

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**Conversation on  
THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM**

**Carter Center, Atlanta, Georgia  
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***ATLANTA PEACH REPORTERS, LLC***  
***Court Reporting and Videography***  
***3775 Clairmont Road***  
***Atlanta, Georgia 30341***

***Phone: (770) 452-0303***

***Fax: (770) 454-0348***

Transcript Legend

(sic) - Exactly as said.

(phonetic) - Exact spelling unknown.

-- Break in Speech Continuity.

[. . . ] indicates halting speech, unfinished

sentence or omission of word[s] when reading.

Quoted material is typed as spoken.

\*\* All speakers' names are phonetic in this particular transcript.

**HOSTS PRESENT**

**MS. SHIRLEY WATKINS**

Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition,  
and Consumer Services, USDA

**MR. VIRGIL CONRAD**

Administrator, Southeast Regional  
Office, USDA/FNS

**MR. SAMUEL CHAMBERS**

Administrator, USDA/FNS

1                   **MS. WATKINS:** I know that people are still  
2 outside signing up because they want to come in and  
3 talk to me. And I'm delighted about that. I don't  
4 want you to think that we didn't intend to start on  
5 time. We did. And I know that you have your  
6 schedules and some of you may have to leave. But I do  
7 want to give them a chance to kind of get in. So, if  
8 you don't mind, we'll wait another minute or two, if  
9 that's okay. Is that okay?

10                   (Whereupon, a choir of voices responded.)

11                   Let's get in and get started. As I indicated to  
12 you earlier, I'm Shirley Watkins. I'm the under  
13 secretary for The Food, Nutrition, and Consumer  
14 Services at the Department of Agriculture in  
15 Washington. And I want to just thank all of you for  
16 being here today. I'm delighted that you're here and  
17 delighted to know that so many of you are here because  
18 of your concern about the Food Stamp Program and your  
19 interest of the program.

20                   Many of you -- And I will say this, and I know  
21 you know it better than I do, that the Food Stamp  
22 Program is the cornerstone of our nutrition assistance  
23 programs in this country. If we're going to provide  
24 nutrition assistance and access, and eliminate hunger

1 in this country, the way the plan and the fathers  
2 many, many years ago -- I would like to say and the  
3 mothers many, many years ago -- wanted to be sure that  
4 people in this country would have access to food and  
5 it would be through the Food Stamp Program.

6 And we want to just make certain that, as we  
7 look forward to reauthorization of these programs in  
8 2002, that the USDA and Food and Nutrition Services,  
9 the agency responsible for administering the program,  
10 has a good idea as to what people around this country  
11 are saying about how they would like to see the  
12 program enhanced.

13 We know already that the program is an  
14 outstanding program in administering to the needs and  
15 eliminating hunger and helping move people to food  
16 insecurity, and helping to move people to self-  
17 sufficiency in this country. We know that many people  
18 who are currently participating in the program  
19 actually need the food supplements and the nutrition  
20 that they are receiving. We also know that, for many  
21 people in this country, it's a short-term fix for them  
22 and they're not on it forever, and it's not a lifetime  
23 thing that people want.

24 But it's wonderful to be in a country where

1       there is concern about people being well nourished and  
2       getting the nutrients that they need and making  
3       certain that their families are well taken care of.

4               We try to refocus our position on the Food Stamp  
5       Program to ensure that we take it back to the original  
6       intent of the Food Stamp Program. And that is to  
7       focus squarely on nutrition, that the program is a  
8       nutrition program and not a welfare program. As I've  
9       said, since I became under secretary, that I don't  
10      administer any welfare programs. All of our programs  
11      are nutrition assistance programs. And that clearly  
12      is what the Food Stamp Program is.

13             Even though it's a wonderful program, and all  
14      wonderful programs can look forward to some  
15      improvement, I think it's a work in progress, and we  
16      can always make some improvements to the program. And  
17      we have that wonderful opportunity for 2002. We want  
18      to position the agency so that by the end of this  
19      month, at the end of August, we would have heard from  
20      people around the country.

21             We frame these listening sessions in the form of  
22      conversations because we want to hear what you have to  
23      say that would improve these programs. It's critical  
24      that you are very open and honest with us on ways you

1 would like to see us make a difference in the lives of  
2 people around the country.

3 I hope we have good representation from  
4 participants, from people who administer the program  
5 at the state and local level, some retailers who will  
6 tell us how they feel about the program, and what they  
7 see on the faces that come through their lines and any  
8 opportunities they see for improvement in the  
9 programs.

10 And I think for us to get all of that  
11 information, from seven areas around this country, is  
12 going to make a major difference in how we reframe and  
13 restructure and refocus our nutrition assistance  
14 programs.

15 One of the things I'd like to do is spend just a  
16 few minutes describing the purpose, goals, and some of  
17 the next steps. And I'll try to put that in  
18 perspective to the program's history and functions.  
19 But I did want to do just a brief overview for you,  
20 before we start listening to your comments and hearing  
21 from all of you today.

22 The first thing, our program had its beginning  
23 as far back as the Depression. And the original  
24 intent of the Food Stamp Act was to strengthen the

1 agricultural economy, achieve a more effective use of  
2 food abundances, and to provide for improved levels of  
3 nutrition among low-income households. The program we  
4 know today began as a pilot program back in 1961 and  
5 it was made permanent in 1964. And then the program  
6 expanded dramatically in 1974 when Congress required  
7 all of the states to make food stamps available to  
8 low-income households.

9 And the Food Stamp Act of 1977 made extensive  
10 changes to the program in the program regulations. It  
11 tightened eligibility criteria. It tightened up some  
12 on administration. It removed the requirements that  
13 Food Stamps have to be purchased by recipients.

14 Since then, the program has grown, reaching an  
15 all-time high, of almost 28 million participants in  
16 March of 1994. And the current participation level is  
17 now around 17 to 18 million per month.

18 The food stamp households are diverse, and it's  
19 a wide-ranging group, representing a broad cross  
20 section of the nation's low-income population. We  
21 call that the working poor because most of the people  
22 on the program are working.

23 Let me give you a few statistics. Over half the  
24 recipients are children and another eight percent are



1 age 60 or older. The majority of the households do  
2 not receive TANF benefits. They receive cash  
3 assistance from SSI, Social Security, and state  
4 general assistance. Nine percent have no income, at  
5 all, they have no income of any kind. Twenty-six  
6 percent of the recipients work. And for these  
7 households, those earnings are the primary source of  
8 the family income. Only ten percent of the working  
9 families make enough to put them above the poverty  
10 line. And 37 percent are at or below the poverty  
11 line. That's for your information. The average food  
12 stamp household has only \$118 in countable resources,  
13 including vehicles, checking and savings accounts.

14 The average food stamp household is small. It's  
15 around 2.4. I've never been able to figure out how  
16 you can be a 2.4, how you can be a four percent of a  
17 person but, you know, if you count it, and statistics,  
18 and they say it's all about numbers. And we do  
19 sometimes play the numbers game, but I'd say it's  
20 about three folks in a house. So somewhere around  
21 three people in a house. And if you want to come in  
22 half, have a leg here and an arm there so you can do  
23 that. However, there are households with children  
24 that are relatively large, averaging about 3.3

1 members. Households with elderly participants are  
2 smaller with an average size of, here I go again, 1.3  
3 members. Well, that gives you an idea of what the  
4 composition of food stamp households are like.

5 We recently co-hosted, with HHS, a national  
6 nutrition summit in Washington. And among the  
7 breakout sessions that we had, we had two that we were  
8 responsible for in our agency. And people had a  
9 choice of discussing a variety of issues and sometimes  
10 more in depth than listening to a variety of speakers.

11 And I'm going to ask you to cut your phones off and  
12 cut your beepers off so that they don't interrupt  
13 anybody here. That's just me. So if you want to step  
14 outside and use your cell phones or whatever, feel  
15 free to do so, but we won't listen to them in here.  
16 We don't want to hear your conversations. That's just  
17 the mean old school teacher that I am.

18 At the first session we had, during the  
19 nutrition summit, it was entitled Faces of Hunger in  
20 America. And one of our guests was Sharon Hornberry  
21 (phonetic). She was a former WIC recipient and a  
22 former Food Stamp recipient. And she had me almost in  
23 tears. One of the things that she told us was that  
24 these programs did not make her dependant. They

1           helped her to succeed. Sometimes people forget that.

2           Sharon is now self reliant, self-sufficient, and she  
3           is a very confident woman. She is now helping other  
4           families to go from the Food Stamp Program to self-  
5           sufficiency. I think, as we go through these  
6           discussions today, we need to keep her words in mind.

7           We have to make sure that the Food Stamp Program  
8           continues to help families succeed.

9           And we're hoping that the suggestions that you  
10          have today, and that you will listen to other people  
11          who are going to participate in this conversation  
12          today, and that will be the key to how we frame what  
13          we're going to do, as we move ahead to 2002.

14          You should already have some handouts, I hope  
15          you picked up at the table when you came in, that will  
16          give you some more detailed information about the  
17          program. You also may have a copy of the Guiding  
18          Principles of the Food Stamp Program.

19          We have a copy up here of those 7 Guiding  
20          Principles. And we wanted to do that so that we could  
21          somehow get everybody on the same page as to what this  
22          program is all about. And that's why we developed  
23          those 7 Guiding Principles. I wanted to be sure that  
24          I wasn't all alone in thinking what I was thinking

1 about this program and what it meant, and what it  
2 meant to families, what it meant to people. And  
3 that's why we have them. And that will kind of help  
4 you to focus your conversation here today.

5 I would hope that, when you take a look at the  
6 principles, that you bear in mind that the improved  
7 nutritional well being is the ultimate measure of  
8 success in the fight to reduce hunger and improve  
9 nutrition. This principle is the foundation of the  
10 program and the heart of the original intent of why  
11 the Food Stamp Program was framed and why this act is  
12 what it is today.

13 And that is the core of why we are here. We  
14 wanted to have your participation in the conversation.

15 I hope you didn't come to think that you're just  
16 going to listen, because we want to hear your voice  
17 and we want to get it on record as to what your  
18 concepts are, what you're thinking.

19 And, as we approach again reauthorization in  
20 2002, it's especially important that we do everything  
21 to make the program as strong and as responsive as we  
22 can to the families who depend on us. I know that you  
23 have lots and lots of suggestions and lots and lots of  
24 ideas. And we want to listen to those.

1           We're going to be in New York next week. Next  
2 Thursday, I'll be in New York. After that, I'll go to  
3 Chicago and Kansas City and Los Angeles and Dallas,  
4 over the next few weeks.

5           We're here to listen to you. I could tell you  
6 I'm from the government and I'm here to listen.  
7 Sometimes I say I'm from the government, I'm here to  
8 help. And I just want you to know we truly are. And  
9 that's why we are out here. Both President Clinton  
10 and Vice President Gore are very, very interested in  
11 this issue. They want to know what your concerns are.

12          I was talking with President Clinton one day and he  
13 was making some announcements on the Food Stamp  
14 Program and I said to him, I really want to simplify  
15 the program. And he said to me, we have to eliminate  
16 the stigma and you have to work hard on it. So we  
17 have a lot of work to do.

18          We know it's called the Food Stamp Program and  
19 for many of you, you don't have stamps anymore. You  
20 have an electronic benefit card. I'd be curious to  
21 find out if you think it still should be named Food  
22 Stamp Program. Should it be called something else?

23          I'm here to listen to you. We have a wonderful  
24 staff here from the southeast regional office. We're

1 delighted to have Virgil Conrad, who is here with us  
2 today, the regional administrator, sitting down on the  
3 end. And he's here to listen. And the administrator,  
4 Sam Chambers, from our Washington headquarters office,  
5 is going to share with you now what we need to do for  
6 today's conversation. Sam.

7 **MR. CHAMBERS:** Good afternoon, everybody. I  
8 join with the under secretary in thanking all of you  
9 for taking time out of your busy schedules to spend  
10 with us. Today's event is a singularly important one.

11 I have to note that in the 22, almost 23 months that  
12 I've been with the agency, and I've traveled around  
13 the country representing our agency's interest, with  
14 regard to all 15 of our domestic nutrition assistance  
15 programs. Certainly, as we talk about the Food Stamp  
16 Program, because it's our flagship program, it tends  
17 to engender a lot of comment from people about how the  
18 program operates, how well it doesn't operate, what  
19 needs to be retained, what needs to change.

20 And this is to repeat what the under secretary  
21 said. This is your hour. This is your day. This is  
22 your afternoon. You have us as a captive audience to  
23 make it clear to us all the things that you want us to  
24 know about this program and why and how it's making a

1 difference and how we can help it make a larger  
2 difference in the lives of all of America's needy  
3 citizens.

4 Today's event is entitled a conversation.  
5 Strategically located around the room are microphones.

6 Those microphones are live. None of them are  
7 dummies. They all operate. The only thing that they  
8 require is a body in front of them and someone with  
9 some comments that they want to make. Please speak as  
10 plainly into the microphone as you possibly can for  
11 two reasons. One, we not only want to hear but we  
12 want all of your colleagues who are sitting here  
13 patiently, we want them to also hear what you have to  
14 say. Perhaps what you say will spark another idea in  
15 their minds. So please approach the mic, grasp it,  
16 speak into it as plainly and loudly as you possibly  
17 can.

18 All comments and today's entire proceeding are  
19 being transcribed. There will be a permanent record.

20 It will be available not only to the under secretary  
21 but to all of our staff who are responsible for  
22 managing the Food Stamp Program.

23 As Ms. Watkins indicated, this is one of seven  
24 visits that she is making around the United States, to

1 allow as many citizens and interested parties to make  
2 whatever comments they have to make. Before or by the  
3 end of August, she will have completed the circuit.  
4 She will have ridden the entire circuit and completed  
5 all of the conversations.

6           Thereafter, those comments will be accumulated  
7 and collected within our national office. Food Stamps  
8 staff will receive all of those comments and then we  
9 will be working to support the under secretary and  
10 deputy under secretary in analyzing all of your  
11 comments and helping her to formulate our plan for the  
12 Food Stamp Program and the effort that we will have to  
13 mount between now and 2002 to seek the reauthorization  
14 of this program. So, by the end of the fall, or  
15 sometime during the fall, we will have provided, if  
16 you will, based on your input and the input of others,  
17 those comments and suggestions and recommendations for  
18 consideration by the administration, including the  
19 under secretary.

20           So, again, please take advantage of the  
21 opportunity that's here today. We heard several  
22 individuals say that they had come to observe. We  
23 hope you also came to speak and to give us the benefit  
24 of whatever your thoughts are today.



1           For those of you who don't have an opportunity,  
2           for whatever reason, to remain long enough to get your  
3           comments into the official record, there will be an  
4           opportunity for you to prepare and present written  
5           comments for our consideration. Those comments will  
6           be forwarded to the national office, the Food Stamp  
7           office, located in Alexandria, Virginia, and we will  
8           have an address where those comments can be sent.

9           So, unless there's questions for me, with regard  
10          to the process for today's proceedings, I'm going to  
11          turn the microphone back over to Under Secretary  
12          Shirley Watkins. Thank you.

13               **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you, Sam. We have a  
14          telephone here. One of the things that people asked  
15          us to do was to make certain that people could call  
16          in. If they could not come into Atlanta, they would  
17          be able to call in. So we have a live telephone up  
18          here. And they will let me know when a call comes in.

19          We've already had some calls, before we got in the  
20          room. So we'll be taking calls, as we move through  
21          the afternoon.

22               This session is going to be from 1:00 until 7:00  
23          this evening and we'll be here. You don't have to  
24          stay. You can come and go. I know many of you have

1 busy schedules. But I will be here, and I will be  
2 here to listen, unless for some strange reason people  
3 stop talking and they decide to leave.

4 One of the things that will be helpful for us,  
5 if you limit your comments to between two and five  
6 minutes so everybody gets a chance to talk.

7 We're delighted you're here. I'm ready to  
8 listen. Do we have people who have signed in already  
9 and ready to talk?

10 Gerald Durden, Fulton County. Is it Geraldine?

11 It is Gerald. It does say Gerald Durden. I  
12 apologize. When I saw the lady get up I thought --  
13 Okay.

14 **MR. GERALD DURDEN:** Well, in the process of  
15 doing Food Stamps on a daily basis, we get a lot of  
16 comments about the EBT card.

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Excuse me. You may want to say  
18 your name when you walk to the microphone. If you  
19 would, just repeat your name, and say where you're  
20 from, if you'd like.

21 **MR. DURDEN:** Okay. My name is Gerald Durden.  
22 I'm from Fulton County Department of Family and  
23 Children Services. In doing the, working with the  
24 Food Stamp Program on a daily basis, oftentimes you

1 get comments about the EBT card. I was wondering,  
2 what's going on with that? That's my comment. That's  
3 my concern.

4 **MS. WATKINS:** I forgot to tell you that I'm here  
5 listening and I'm not going to comment. I wanted to  
6 hear your comments though. Are you wanting to know if  
7 you're going to get EBT in Fulton County?

8 **MR. DURDEN:** Well, we have EBT in Fulton County  
9 right now. And we get -- Well, I get phone calls a  
10 lot about that.

11 **MS. WATKINS:** Tell us a little bit more about  
12 the kind of comments that you're getting so, for the  
13 record, we know what the issue is.

14 **MR. DURDEN:** People have concerns about how to  
15 use them, about --

16 **MS. CAROLYN PITTMAN:** Can I help him out?

17 **MR. DURDEN:** Yeah, help me out.

18 **MS. WATKINS:** Go to the mic and then -- There's  
19 one right there.

20 **MR. CONRAD:** Identify yourself, please.

21 **MS. PITTMAN:** My name is Carolyn Pittman. I'm  
22 with the Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger. Also,  
23 I'm the chairperson of the Georgia Human Rights Union.  
24 Some of the concerns that members of the Georgia

1 Human Rights Union has is that just the other day one  
2 of the persons went to the grocery store and they said  
3 something about the EBT machine was shut down and that  
4 it was something with the satellite. I mean, in the  
5 line, you had people standing in the store line with  
6 babies, you know. And everybody that had --

7 And I am a former welfare recipient. And I  
8 thank God that I, you know, am self-sufficient now.

9 But I know, if you're standing in the line with  
10 your groceries and they say the EBT machine has shut  
11 down, what do they do? Do you know what people were  
12 doing? They had to leave. And I'm sure that a lot of  
13 them had to leave hungry.

14 So we really, that's one of the biggest issues  
15 that we have to look at. What are we going to do  
16 about that?

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Okay. Thank you. Was that your  
18 concern?

19 **MR. DURDEN:** That, and people tend to have a  
20 concern about waiting for the EBT card.

21 **MS. PITTMAN:** Right.

22 **MR. DURDEN:** They have to wait so long. That's  
23 what I really wanted to talk about or to comment on.  
24 Expedited services, when you get the benefits on an

1 expedited way, instead of waiting in the past, say,  
2 three days, it's more or less ten days. And that has  
3 been a concern. That's what I really wanted to say.  
4 Thank you.

5 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Okay, the next person  
6 I have is Mark Barwick.

7 **MS. ROSALYN NIXON:** No, Rosalyn Nixon.

8 **MS. WATKINS:** Pardon me?

9 **MS. NIXON:** I'm Rosalyn Nixon.

10 **MS. WATKINS:** The next person that I have signed  
11 up is Mark Barwick. We'll get to you.

12 **MR. MARK BARWICK:** Thank you. I'm Mark Barwick.  
13 I'm the southeast regional coordinator for Bread for  
14 the World, a nationwide citizens movement against  
15 hunger.

16 A couple of things that we wanted to be sure to  
17 lift up in this conversation, particularly the  
18 importance of the Food Stamp Program. We're very  
19 grateful to have this conversation because the Food  
20 Stamp Program has been on the front line of preventing  
21 hunger in our country for a number of years now.

22 And I especially want to look for, of the under  
23 secretary and the Clinton administration, for the  
24 Hunger Relief Act that's before Congress right now.

1       It's HR 3192 and Senate Bill 1805 that would  
2       strengthen and expand Food Stamp eligibility for a  
3       number of important populations, particularly for  
4       legal immigrants.

5               And I guess the biggest comment that we would  
6       want to make is just how doable it really is in our  
7       country to reverse the trend of hunger. And Food  
8       Stamps is certainly such an important part of that.

9               In our hunger report, from Bread for the World  
10       Institute, for 2000, a lot of statistical data is  
11       presented to support the idea that, if we would just  
12       really fund the Food Stamp Program, we could cut  
13       hunger in half in this country, in just a matter of  
14       just a few years. So one important first step that  
15       could take place this year would be just a real  
16       concerted effort by the administration and Congress to  
17       pass the Hunger Relief Act.

18              There are a lot of obstacles that people have,  
19       like the cost of the vehicle that they own, or housing  
20       costs that really have gotten in the way, as well as  
21       citizenship of people who really could use Food Stamps  
22       but they are ineligible because of some current laws.

23              So we'd really like to have your support in  
24       speaking with President Clinton, to be more vocal

1           around that in particular. Thank you.

2           **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much. Lauren

3           Smith.

4           **MR. SCOTT JOHNSON:** Thank you. Lauren is one of

5           our retail representatives here. To sort of set the

6           stage for what they would like to say and how the

7           retailer is affected -- I'm Scott Johnson with the

8           Food Marketing Institute and wanted to kind of set the

9           stage for what the retailers would say. So if that's

10          fine with you --

11          **MS. WATKINS:** Is she not going to speak?

12          **MR. JOHNSON:** Yes, she will.

13          **MS. WATKINS:** Okay, then we'd just like to kind

14          of roll in this order, if that's okay.

15          **MR. JOHNSON:** Okay. I think what she has to say

16          would be more valuable if you would allow me to speak

17          first.

18          **MS. WATKINS:** It's going to work out and I think

19          we'll be okay.

20          **MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you.

21          **MS. WATKINS:** You're welcome. It's going to

22          work.

23          **MS. LAUREN SMITH:** I'm Lauren Smith. I'm with

24          the Kroger company. And Mr. Johnson was going to kind

1 of set the stage for this but --

2 Basically, we're here to make a comment that we  
3 love the EBT program, it's great for business, it's  
4 wonderful for the customers. Our concerns are with  
5 the processors, system downtime, outages, the length  
6 of time it's taking the customers to receive  
7 settlements and so forth.

8 I have had some instances with customers, the  
9 system, which EDS experienced a major system outage on  
10 June 12. Some of these customers had to wait three  
11 weeks to receive their benefit refunds. That was  
12 three weeks that these customers had no food, had no  
13 groceries, could not feed their families.

14 A lot of the problems we're seeing is mainly  
15 with the EDS gateway. What's happening is we're  
16 approving, we're sending out for an approval on a  
17 transaction. It's going to EDS, routing to Citibank  
18 for an approval. Citibank is approving the  
19 transaction, sending it back to EDS. The transaction  
20 is going no further. The customer's account is being  
21 debited. The merchant is not being paid. The  
22 customer is not getting the groceries.

23 Bottom line, you know, we need to do something  
24 to address that issue. You know, we can't have people



1 on this program needing food and not being able to  
2 give it to them. That puts the retailers and the  
3 customers in an untenable position.

4 That's all I had really to say, at this point.  
5 Everybody else in the group will add more to that.  
6 Thank you.

7 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Patricia Hoffman. Let  
8 me just explain how this is working. We have a list  
9 and I'm just reading off the list where people have  
10 signed up. So it's not going to come maybe in the  
11 order that you organized it, so just bear with us.  
12 You'll have a chance.

13 **MS. PATRICIA HOFFMAN:** My name is Patricia  
14 Hoffman. I'm from the Macon County Food Stamp Office  
15 in Tuskegee, Alabama.

16 My comment has to do with making available one  
17 vehicle per working family. I saw a lady yesterday  
18 who was turning in a quarterly report form. The only  
19 change that she had was she had gotten a newer  
20 vehicle. She was \$1,225 over the resource limit. Her  
21 comment to me was, I can't eat the car. So, you know,  
22 which is a valid concern, because her income had not  
23 changed.

24 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Janice McDowell.

1                   **MS. JANICE MCDOWELL:** Hi, I'm Janice McDowell  
2 from the Mississippi Department of Human Services.  
3 Hello, Mr. Conrad. We brought you a present, did they  
4 tell you?

5                   **MR. CONRAD:** As long as it's not more than \$20.

6                   **MS. MCDOWELL:** No, no, no. It's going to cost  
7 you a bundle. It's the MCAP waiver.

8                   We have some concerns that relate to vehicles  
9 that's already been addressed. Transportation in  
10 Mississippi is always a problem. It's particularly a  
11 problem for people who are trying to maintain adequate  
12 transportation to go to and from work, to maintain  
13 employment. It's a problem for the elderly and  
14 disabled who need to go for medical treatment and for  
15 the various things that the family needs a vehicle  
16 for.

17                   We have also asked for the waiver with the  
18 proposed regs that allow the \$1,000 equity or the  
19 \$1,500 equity and have begun that in July. This is  
20 not a solution. This is a contrived manipulation of  
21 the Food Stamp law, and we just simply need to fix the  
22 law to increase the value allowed for a vehicle or to  
23 allow at least one exemption of a vehicle per family.

24                   We do that in our TANF program and I think most

1 of the states have taken the flexibility that the TANF  
2 block grant allowed us with Welfare Reform to do this.

3 It is working. This is a backdoor approach to  
4 getting categorically eligible for Food Stamps.

5 Again, this is not a fix for the Food Stamp  
6 Program because TANF is time limited. This is not  
7 going to last forever. We really need to deal with  
8 the vehicle problem.

9 The other issues that we have in Mississippi  
10 regarding vehicles relate to people who have a family  
11 crisis, who are laid off from work. Their vehicles  
12 that they have used to go and come to work are decent  
13 vehicles. They may not be brand new but they are way  
14 over the 1,000 or \$1,500 equity. And this is just not  
15 going to help them.

16 We hear the comments in our offices, I've worked  
17 all my life. I need some help right now to get back  
18 on my feet, you know, while I'm disabled or while I'm  
19 drawing unemployment and trying to find a new job. I  
20 need a way to feed my family. And this is a very  
21 valid concern for the people in our state. Probably  
22 enough about vehicles.

23 We are concerned about the low benefits for our  
24 elderly and disabled. We frequently hear, and

1 Mississippi has held some public hearings. One of the  
2 first comments that we heard in all of these public  
3 hearings throughout the state was what about these \$10  
4 benefits for our elderly and disabled. I'm frankly  
5 not sure what our average benefit is for our elderly  
6 and disabled but it is quite low, because of their  
7 very low income, SSI and Social Security combination.

8 So we are concerned about that.

9 We have some concerns about our ENT program, the  
10 funding constraints that have been imposed on the ENT  
11 program since we've been into, since 1996. We have  
12 forgotten about our families who need help because of  
13 the funding restrictions, the percentage that have to  
14 be used on the ABODs. We need to be able to expand  
15 that and not have those constraints. We need to have  
16 flexibility in the funding for the ENT program and be  
17 allowed to provide more supportive services for people  
18 who are participating in our program.

19 I'm still not sure about ABODs, whether that's  
20 working or not. You know, most of them tell us it's  
21 just not worth it. It causes a lot of confusion in  
22 the family. And I'm sure somebody's got a better  
23 solution than that for it.

24 The medical expenses and quality control issues,

1       there's got to be a better solution for that too for  
2       our elderly and disabled.

3               We talked a lot, several years ago, about  
4       conformity between the programs, between TANF and Food  
5       Stamps. Every time we got one program to move towards  
6       the other one, the other one moved away. And now that  
7       we've gotten some flexibility with our TANF program,  
8       Mississippi found it easier to move TANF toward some  
9       of the Food Stamp rules than to try to move Food  
10      Stamps. So we have been able to do some of that  
11      internally.

12             I would hope that the federal programs, even  
13      though we are administered under different funding  
14      divisions, departments, that we do look at the  
15      interrelatedness of these programs and understand how  
16      one program affects the other. This is a very vital  
17      point because we can penalize Food Stamp folks for  
18      TANF violations and all of this. So we need to look  
19      at the conformity of these programs and be sure that  
20      we are making it as simple as possible so that the  
21      families, as well as our staff, can understand and  
22      apply the rules uniformly, correctly.

23             **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Ann Joseph.

24             **MS. ANN JOSEPH:** I'm not going to speak now.

1                   **MS. WATKINS:** Okay. Doug McIntosh.

2                   **MR. DOUG MCINTOSH:** I'm Doug McIntosh from the  
3 Georgia State Agency. Everything I prepared to say,  
4 Mississippi kind of stole my thunder. I would like to  
5 echo the same comment, as the state administrator.

6                   The program has become extremely difficult and  
7 complicated for us to administer. Caseworkers have a  
8 difficult time understanding the regulations. I think  
9 for all of the issues that Mississippi mentioned,  
10 certainly the ENT program, certainly vehicles,  
11 certainly the benefits for the elderly, these, I  
12 think, are all issues that are contributing to driving  
13 people away from the program, which I think is  
14 something that we're certainly concerned about. We're  
15 not serving those people that perhaps need the  
16 assistance because of some of these complicated rules.

17                   So, as the state administrator, I simply wanted  
18 to echo those same comments and try to reinforce them.

19                   **MS. WATKINS:** Mr. McIntosh, you may want to  
20 submit your comments as written comments.

21                   **MR. MCINTOSH:** Surely.

22                   **MS. WATKINS:** The more of the same that we have,  
23 the better off we are, as we start looking at all this  
24 stuff.

1                   **MR. MCINTOSH:** Surely. We'll be glad to.

2                   **MS. WATKINS:** If you feel that you are  
3 duplicating what someone has already said, if you  
4 want, just make certain that you submit some written  
5 comments.

6                   **MR. MCINTOSH:** I certainly will.

7                   **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Eleanor Thompson.

8                   **MS. ELEANOR THOMPSON:** Hi, I'm Eleanor Thompson.  
9 I'm with America's Second Harvest.

10                   As you probably know, America's Second Harvest  
11 is the nation's largest domestic hunger relief  
12 organization. We have over 200 affiliated food banks  
13 and food rescue agencies which do a great job in  
14 helping hungry people. There are a number of things  
15 that I'd just like to touch upon real quickly.

16                   As Food Stamp usage has dropped, our food banks  
17 have seen a huge increase in demand. So there  
18 obviously are many hungry people out there, probably a  
19 number of whom find the Food Stamp Program to be  
20 perhaps too onerous to utilize.

21                   In addition to supporting some more, I wouldn't  
22 call them minor, but some more incremental steps  
23 towards improving the Food Stamp Program, we do  
24 support, like Bread for the World, the Hunger Relief

1 Act, the provisions that are included in that. We  
2 also support the Fork Act, which is currently before  
3 the Congress. And we also support some more broader  
4 changes to the program.

5 You had asked, in your opening statements,  
6 whether or not people thought that the name of the  
7 program needed to be changed. That's something that  
8 we certainly would support because we think that there  
9 is a real stigma for many people with the Food Stamp  
10 Program.

11 We also support increasing the minimum income  
12 level from 130 percent of the poverty level to at  
13 least 150 percent.

14 We also support increasing the asset level to  
15 \$5,000 per household and changing the program  
16 calculation to use the moderate food plan, rather than  
17 the thrifty food plan.

18 Other provisions that America's Second Harvest  
19 strongly supports are increasing the minimum allotment  
20 from \$10 to at least \$20 per month.

21 We also do support exempting one vehicle per  
22 Food Stamp household and increasing the Food Stamp  
23 shelter deduction cap.

24 One other thing that we have seen as a problem,



1 has appeared to be a problem for a number of the  
2 states, has been the tying of error rates to whether  
3 or not a Food Stamp Program in a particular state is  
4 doing well. Illinois, for example, has a pretty good  
5 Food Stamp Program but finds that their error rates  
6 may be above the average. And we would encourage you  
7 to look at other ways of tying the success of a  
8 state's program to something other than error rates,  
9 which we think oftentimes penalize states unfairly.

10 Finally, just to improve access and to simplify  
11 the program, we do support reducing the application  
12 length and the process, utilizing a standard deduction  
13 to decrease verification requirements.

14 And we also support reinstating legal immigrants  
15 to eligibility for the Food Stamp Program. Thank you  
16 very much.

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Scott Baker.

18 **MR. SCOTT BAKER:** My name is Scott Baker with  
19 the Kroger company, here in Atlanta, Georgia. I'll  
20 echo some of the comments that have been made previous  
21 about the failure of the current system to deliver on  
22 a consistent basis.

23 The needs of the Food Stamp recipients,  
24 particularly serviced by the Southern Alliance of

1 States, just a week ago the system experienced a major  
2 outage that caused us not to be able to deliver on a  
3 timely basis the benefits that the people need. It is  
4 becoming more and more frustrating to us and to the  
5 recipients too, on a monthly basis. We've gone three  
6 of the past four months, we've had outages at the key  
7 times. And, as Lauren stated earlier, these outages  
8 can vary, as far as the dramatic effects on the  
9 recipients of the program.

10 And we're here as a group to really plead for  
11 all of us to make some improvements in the system.  
12 It's a company we don't deal with directly and it's  
13 extremely frustrating on our part to bring corrections  
14 and improvements to the system that must happen  
15 because we can't tolerate, no one can tolerate.

16 We've talked all the statistics given, the  
17 people that come in that need the food, when the cards  
18 are loaded at the first of the month, they can't wait  
19 two to three weeks because administrative processes  
20 have broken down. They need their food immediately.  
21 It's just becoming a bigger and bigger issue for us.  
22 Thank you.

23 **MS. WATKINS:** Mr. Baker, would you give me the  
24 outage dates again. Was that the week of July 4?

1                   **MR. BAKER:** We had an outage last Thursday that  
2 was major.

3                   **MS. WATKINS:** Which was what date? I'm just  
4 looking for a date.

5                   **MR. BAKER:** The 6<sup>th</sup>. And then again on the 7<sup>th</sup>  
6 there was also a major outage. The 6<sup>th</sup> was extreme.  
7 The 7<sup>th</sup> was about an hour and a half.

8                   **MS. WATKINS:** Okay, thank you. Willette Foster.

9                   **MS. WILLETTE FOSTER:** My name is Willette Foster  
10 and I'm a recipient. I'm a consumer.

11                   May 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year I went in to be recertified  
12 at a satellite office where I live. I'm from Macon,  
13 Georgia. That's Bibb County. When I went in to have  
14 my interview, I was greeted by a Ms. Stevens who was  
15 my caseworker, along with two police officers. She  
16 told me that they would be there to sit in on my  
17 interview. The interview did not take place. I left  
18 the office. For one I was ashamed. Two, I was  
19 confused. Three, I was feeling indignant because I  
20 hadn't done anything to her.

21                   I went home and I called down to the downtown  
22 office on Ogelthorpe Street to try to speak with a Ms.  
23 Ormand (phonetic), who is the director, to no avail.  
24 I called No. 2 Peachtree Street and I spoke with a Ms.

1        Stewart and a Ms. Brantley. Still, no answer. So,  
2        finally, I called Georgia Legal Services.

3                And I could not be recertified until I had a  
4        meeting with the assistant director whose name is Ms.  
5        Blue (phonetic). Once I got there and we talked, she  
6        told me that a supervisor from the main office would  
7        be my caseworker and within two days I did, I was  
8        recertified and I did receive the allotted amount on  
9        the date.

10               But my concern is, one, going into that office  
11        and being threatened and intimidated the way that I  
12        was. All this stemmed from me calling No. 2 Peachtree  
13        Street and writing Senator Coverdell.

14               **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Scott Johnson. Now  
15        you get a chance to speak. It's okay.

16               **MR. SCOTT JOHNSON:** Thank you. Forgive me for  
17        trying to get up out of order earlier.

18               **MS. WATKINS:** That's okay. It's all a family.

19               **MR. JOHNSON:** That's right. I'm Scott Johnson,  
20        director of southeast operations. I run the Atlanta  
21        office here for the Food Marketing Institute. We're  
22        the trade association for the retail food industry.

23               The Food Stamp Program has been a good  
24        partnership between retailers, recipients, the

1 government for over 35 years now, as you're well  
2 aware. In the information age, certainly the move  
3 from paper Food Stamps to EBT, Electronic Benefits  
4 Transfer, was a natural progression. And we've  
5 enjoyed being a part of that. In fact, FMI has worked  
6 on the EBT program since it was a concept, actually  
7 since 1979 when the first talk began. And, Virgil,  
8 you were there for all of it. It's been a long  
9 process and we all experienced a lot of birth pains  
10 along the way.

11 And we've enjoyed a lot of success along the way  
12 too. And we're grateful for that. We enjoyed success  
13 because we remained partners. We remained partners  
14 that were always looking for ways to make it work and  
15 make it work better.

16 In much of the country, individual states have  
17 hired Citibank Corporation as  
18 the primary processor of those  
19 benefits. And some of the  
20 experience from that has been  
21 okay and some of it has been  
22 rocky. Lately there have been  
23 more rocks. The biggest  
24 problems, downtime or system

1 outages that the retailers have  
2 experienced, which causes  
3 recipients not to be able to  
4 receive their benefits.

5 FMI, in November of 1999, we did something  
6 called the in-store systems study. Retailers reported  
7 to us in November of 1999, more than half of them  
8 reported failures of the EBT system due to computer  
9 problems, at least once a month. Thirty-eight  
10 percent, once or twice a month. Seven percent, once  
11 or twice a week. And nine percent three or more times  
12 a week.

13 Those are beginning to look like the good old  
14 days to us because, since that has happened, Citibank  
15 has hired a different partner, not Deluxe, who they  
16 had in the past, but EDS, who is their current  
17 partner, to process the benefits for EBT. They made  
18 that decision last year. They wanted to do it in  
19 November. We protested because those are the holidays  
20 for us and we said any problems that would occur would  
21 have serious impact on our business. They said, don't  
22 worry about problems. But they did wait until 2000 to  
23 do that. Well, we are so glad we didn't allow it or  
24 we protested during the holidays because the problems

1 have been many. They've multiplied, as a matter of  
2 fact, since EDS took over the processing as a partner  
3 for Citibank.

4 The biggest problem is what's already been  
5 talked about here today has been large-scale excessive  
6 downtime periods where the retailers lose sales and  
7 recipients go hungry. For example, as Mr. Baker said,  
8 June 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Those are just  
9 recent big examples. There are smaller examples that  
10 I could site, you know, many, many dates but those are  
11 big problems.

12 Our retail stores experienced massive outages.  
13 June 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> was 25 states and Washington, D. C.,  
14 your home. July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, a national retailer has  
15 reported to us that it was 31 states that they had  
16 problems processing benefits on July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

17 The most serious of that is something called,  
18 the technical term is timeout reversal. Now what that  
19 means is simply the transaction at the check lane gets  
20 declined and the retailer loses the sales, of course,  
21 but the recipient, the benefits are no longer there  
22 for them to be used immediately. And it can be weeks  
23 before those benefits are restored to the recipient's  
24 card. From what I understand, there are many people

1           who can't go weeks without eating.

2                     I have here a letter that we just sent to you  
3           earlier this week from Tim Hammonds (phonetic) who is  
4           our president and CEO of the Food Marketing Institute.

5           It has not only a description of the problem but some  
6           people from here in the Atlanta area. Now this is  
7           nine people whose names and phone numbers are here,  
8           that represent thousands, that had this problem, this  
9           is from the June outage. We could pick up that phone  
10          and call them and they'd verify that.

11                    But what we are here today to say is recipients  
12          need their food. Retailers don't like to lose sales  
13          and we don't like to have to put back dozens, 20, 30,  
14          40, 50 carts of food that people leave because they  
15          have to walk out without their benefits.

16                    There are other problems at retail, some of them  
17          will be described from the other people who are going  
18          to speak, as far as retail is concerned.

19                    We appreciate you being here. We appreciate you  
20          listening. And we appreciate you helping solve these  
21          problems. I'd like to give you this letter from Mr.  
22          Hammonds.

23                    **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you so much. Bob McGeehee.

24                    **MR. BOB MCGEEHEE:** Very good. I don't get that



1 very often. I appreciate that. You did well, thank  
2 you. My name is Bob McGeehee. I'm with Super Value.

3 We represent independent stores scattered throughout  
4 the southeast, approximately 600 stores scattered  
5 throughout Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and  
6 Louisiana.

7 Our stores are, a big chunk of them are in the  
8 rural areas. A lot of times we're the only game in  
9 town, we're the only store that's available to them in  
10 that town. So when these outages occur, they have no  
11 place else to go. I mean, they're stuck. They're in  
12 that line. And you mentioned stigma. I mean, the  
13 card is a huge step. The Electronic Benefits Transfer  
14 card is a huge step to removing that stigma. But when  
15 these outages occur, it's right back where it was.

16 And the stated goal of the 99 percent uptime  
17 sounds good, but that's three and a half days a year.

18 That's about four minutes out of every day that the  
19 system is down. Now that's huge. And it's been a  
20 whole lot worse than a 99 percent uptime in the last  
21 few months.

22 In my position, I see all of the up and down  
23 times not only from the EBT network but from all the  
24 other credit card companies and the debit card

1 companies. And for a debit card company to be having  
2 less than a 90 percent approval rating, rockets go  
3 off, planets collide, people jump through hoops to  
4 make things right. Anything above 80 percent at EBT  
5 is considered wonderful.

6 It's not a level playing field and the  
7 recipients are paying the price because they get there  
8 and they're stuck. They have no place else to go.

9 One other point I'd like to make is that one of  
10 the processes that happens is when they put in their  
11 PIN number, everybody is familiar with a PIN number.  
12 On the EBT card, they get three shots to get that  
13 right. Because of some of the system problems, if  
14 they send their card through and they get an error  
15 back saying that the PIN number is wrong, even though  
16 they entered it correctly, they'll do it again. And  
17 if the system problem is still there, they'll get that  
18 same error back so they've got one more time that they  
19 can access that number in that day. And those people  
20 get very nervous and very traumatized because they  
21 know they've got one more shot left until midnight of  
22 that day to make that transaction work. And I would  
23 highly recommend removing that piece or that safeguard  
24 that allows the PIN number or allows the card to

1       become deactivated until midnight of that day when  
2       they have had more than three errors on their PIN  
3       number.

4               In general, I'd just like to, again, thank  
5       everybody for being here today and just we want to  
6       remove that stigma that President Clinton mentioned.  
7       Some of these stigmas are not only for the recipients  
8       but for the stores because they're perceived as not  
9       delivering the services as expected. Thank you.

10              **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Now I don't know if  
11       I'm going to do as well so forgive me. Cathy Cozava  
12       (phonetic). I tried.

13              **MS. CATHY COZAVA:** If you got that one right, I  
14       would have been really impressed. Madam Under  
15       Secretary, we thank you for the opportunity to be here  
16       to talk to you today. My name is Cathy Cozava and I'm  
17       the president of the Georgia Food Industry  
18       Association. We represent retailers and wholesalers  
19       across the state of Georgia. We have the largest  
20       chain stores, as well as the independents, the mom and  
21       pop stores across the state.

22              I wanted to piggyback also on something Bob  
23       McGeehee said and that President Clinton said, as far  
24       as eliminating the stigma. One thing that I want to

1 make sure that you understand, not only when the  
2 system goes down is the problem with the recipients,  
3 but the people behind them in line are so frustrated  
4 that now, rather than just watching someone use their  
5 Food Stamps, all of a sudden you have customers that  
6 are angry at people who have this card because they're  
7 holding up the line. So the poor recipient is in line  
8 with no fault of their own holding up the line because  
9 the system goes down.

10 As I say that, I want to let you know we think  
11 EBT is wonderful. We truly, truly do. I have served  
12 on the state EBT task force, as well as the national  
13 EBT task force in putting together SAS. I worked on  
14 it for years and years. Some of the people in the  
15 room I've known for many years. I've worked with  
16 Virgil Conrad. We have a wonderful working  
17 relationship. I cannot tell you how much these people  
18 want EBT to work. By God, they call all the time. As  
19 soon as something is wrong, I know it immediately.  
20 And they feel horrible. They want it to work.

21 My problem is, and this is what I -- I know you  
22 can't answer the question but this is what I would  
23 love to take back. Who is ultimately responsible to  
24 make EBT work? When a retailer has a problem, when a

1 recipient has a problem, they'll call the store,  
2 they'll call the state, they'll call my office. When  
3 I call the state, my God, they want this thing to  
4 work. The contract that the retailer has is with the  
5 state government. The state cannot, they don't know  
6 how, nor do I, how to push a button to make this thing  
7 work right. So, ultimately, I am asking for the  
8 federal government to take a bigger role in making  
9 sure and putting pressure on the processor to make  
10 sure this thing is up.

11 I understand now when different states go to an  
12 EBT program there are fewer and fewer processors that  
13 are even interested in bidding on the EBT program. I  
14 think that needs to be answered, why is that. And if  
15 it becomes that there are just one or two, probably  
16 one company that is going to be interested in actually  
17 bidding on this, you've got a monopoly and we're  
18 stuck. And I would just like you to think about if  
19 there was one grocery store in the state -- Now  
20 somebody here might like that, depending on who you  
21 ask, but I guarantee you the rest of this place would  
22 not. And you would get the food that they carried.  
23 You would get the prices that they set. You'd get  
24 everything. And that makes me nervous.

1           So I'd like you to look at why do we only have  
2 one company typically bidding and who can we  
3 ultimately hold responsible. That's what we, as  
4 retailers, and the recipients I know would like to  
5 know.

6           When EBT works, there's nothing better. When  
7 EBT doesn't, it is a horror. Thank you so much.

8           **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Tony Fitzpatrick.

9           **MR. TONY FITZPATRICK:** How are you doing? I'm  
10 Tony Fitzpatrick, corporate director for Wayfield  
11 Foods. Cathy kind of stole some of my thunder about  
12 one of the points that I was going to address. Let me  
13 kind of give you a little background about my company.

14           We are predominantly in the inner city urban  
15 areas. The company was started in 1982 and then, when  
16 some of the larger chains moved out, we moved in.  
17 We're an independent operator. We have 11 stores.  
18 The reduction in the Food Stamp Program has already  
19 caused a major impact on our business. Now it's even  
20 more impacted by this EBT system.

21           One out of every four of our customers during  
22 the peak Food Stamp period is an EBT or Food Stamp  
23 recipient. Now imagine a busy Saturday afternoon,  
24 it's 3 o'clock, peak business, boom, it shuts down.

1 One out of four of our customers is a Food Stamp  
2 recipient.

3 What we're facing here is one of the points.  
4 And I read your 7 Guiding Principles. Administrative  
5 simplicity is not happening. It's not happening.

6 And for lack of a better term, it's fastly  
7 becoming a discriminatory situation. Cathy pointed  
8 out, those people in line, they see that Food Stamp  
9 recipient holding up the line and it gets downright  
10 ugly sometimes on a Saturday afternoon. And all they  
11 see is that person holding up the line.

12 The second part of that equation is they see,  
13 well, they're at Wayfield Foods. It damages our  
14 reputation also because they associate that downtime  
15 with being at Wayfield Foods. We can tell them until  
16 we're blue in the face that it's happening all across  
17 the country. They're not buying it. It's happening  
18 at Wayfield Foods and they feel as though, if they go  
19 down the street, then it will be a better situation.  
20 So, God forbid, they go down the street, the system  
21 comes back up, and we have a problem, oh, it was  
22 Wayfield Foods. It really can be a really heart  
23 wrenching situation for us.

24 It's not just a Wayfield Foods problem.

1 Obviously, as has been expressed early today, it's a  
2 situation that we need your help with. I was with  
3 Cathy in Washington a month or so ago and we pleaded  
4 to Senator Cleland and we pleaded to Congresswoman  
5 McKinney to employ pressure on these situations to try  
6 to help this get better. And now I'm pleading to you.

7 We need your assistance in trying to make this a  
8 better situation. Thank you.

9 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Cynthia Lawrence.

10 (Whereupon, there was no response.)

11 If Cynthia comes back and wants to speak later  
12 on, if someone would let me know.

13 Sandra Robertson.

14 **MS. SANDRA ROBERTSON:** Hi, everybody. I'm  
15 Sandra Robertson. I'm the director of the Georgia  
16 Citizens Coalition on Hunger. And I too thank you for  
17 the opportunity to have a conversation about the Food  
18 Stamp Program.

19 I myself am a former WIC mother, and so I have  
20 great appreciation for all your food and nutrition  
21 programs. And certainly the Food Stamp Program is one  
22 that has one of the greatest impacts on providing  
23 nutritional benefits to our populations.

24 Many of the comments that have already been made



1 would be similar comments that we would make but I'm  
2 going to reiterate those that I'd like to really  
3 emphasize for you to really pay attention to.

4 The increase in the value of a vehicle or a  
5 waiver for the vehicle is critical. In this modern  
6 world, it is almost unheard of for you to be able to  
7 function appropriately without a vehicle. Even if you  
8 live in the city, if you are going to find viable  
9 employment that pays you a decent wage, you're almost  
10 required to go outside of the city to do that. And  
11 public transportation, in most of our cities, in the  
12 state of Georgia, do not exist for the vast majority  
13 of our state. And so a vehicle is an absolute  
14 necessity of life.

15 And to place this burden on recipients of Food  
16 Stamps that they can only have a vehicle that  
17 virtually is ragged and torn up and not functioning  
18 because of the requirements, a vehicle that is under  
19 \$10,000 is really almost always a vehicle with lots of  
20 problems. And so we suggest that there be a waiver on  
21 that.

22 The low benefits of the elderly would be another  
23 consideration that I'd ask for you to look at.

24 The cost of living, as it relates to what a

1 dollar can buy, there needs to be a real serious look  
2 at what percentage of a food budget can the Food Stamp  
3 Program provide for those citizens that have a need so  
4 that there is a degree of food security in this  
5 country, so that we can truly have a situation where  
6 we eliminate hunger in the United States. I believe  
7 that that can be, if we have the will to make that  
8 happen. And so we suggest that there be a look at the  
9 actual value of the Food Stamp dollar, in terms of the  
10 necessity of life for purchasing food.

11 We too are in support of the Hunger Relief Act.

12 We also would support the moderate food plan, as  
13 opposed to the thrifty food plan. We also increase --

14 We'd also support the utilization of a standard  
15 deduction to eliminate -- We have so many cases. I  
16 mentioned that I'm the director of the Georgia  
17 Citizens Coalition on Hunger. I'm also a member of  
18 SERAHN, the Southeastern Anti Hunger Network.

19 I know in our state and in the states that are a  
20 part of the southeast that deal with hunger issues, we  
21 are continually having complaints about the  
22 recertification process and having to bring  
23 information in to Food Stamp offices, and having that  
24 information lost, and having to go through the process

1 over and over again. It's critical for many of the  
2 persons that are seeking assistance, particularly  
3 those in rural areas where transportation to and from  
4 those offices is quite difficult.

5 We also, we were one of the groups that were  
6 called the naysayer when we talked about the EBT  
7 program because we had real concerns about a lot of  
8 things regarding that process. One was the  
9 privatization of a public program and putting a major  
10 chunk of money in corporate hands to operate a human  
11 service program, because the profit motive just  
12 doesn't work in that arena the way it should work.  
13 And I still have questions about that. The cost  
14 incurred versus the services rendered is truly  
15 something we need to look at, as it relates to the  
16 operation of that program.

17 Aside from all the other complaints and concerns  
18 that have been raised here, I would raise the concern  
19 as to whether or not we need to have that in corporate  
20 hands and whether or not that is a function of the  
21 public domain and whether we should keep it in the  
22 public domain so that there can be accountability and  
23 so that there can be the kind of services rendered for  
24 the maximum dollar spent.

1 I think those are the major issues, but I also  
2 want to share with you some of the kinds of cases, and  
3 I'm just going to give you one or two, that we get  
4 from many of the clients that come in for our  
5 services.

6 We happen to operate a small pantry, serving  
7 some 500 to 600 people a month who come into our  
8 office looking for emergency assistance. Sometimes  
9 they are recipients of Food Stamps and their Food  
10 Stamp dollar doesn't get them through the month.

11 Oftentimes, they are coming in because they have  
12 lost their Food Stamps or they've been  
13 indiscriminately removed from the Food Stamp rolls.  
14 And when we inquire as to why they have been removed,  
15 many times they don't have or have not been told a  
16 good reason, from our perspective. They were told  
17 that they received a notification for recertification  
18 and many times they say they haven't received a  
19 written notice. Now I know that that can be an issue,  
20 but there needs to be some way that the client can  
21 have some degree of protection from a caseworker that  
22 says they sent a notice and, in fact, they didn't send  
23 a notice.

24 And we had a case just recently that came to our

1 office that I wanted Ms. Ellie Jones to tell us about  
2 but she's a little shy. That case that a client had  
3 come in to the Food Stamp office, was expecting to  
4 receive her benefits, was told that her case had been  
5 closed. When asked why she was told that she missed a  
6 recertification appointment. She said she had not  
7 received a letter for recertification but her Stamps  
8 were still terminated. In the process, she was  
9 referred to a legal services attorney. They requested  
10 to look at her file, discovered that there was no  
11 recertification notice in her file that would indicate  
12 that she had been mailed a recertification, and so the  
13 process now is that she has been found innocent of the  
14 charges against her. She has been reinstated but she  
15 has had more than a 30-day delay in getting those  
16 benefits recouped back to her that was inconveniently  
17 taken from her.

18 These situations are common. They are not rare.

19 And I would just hope that we would take a look at  
20 that process of the recertification process.

21 One last comment I want to make, before I sit  
22 down, is the attitude. I don't know what you can do  
23 about that, but there is an attitude problem. We get  
24 time and time again, and if it was just a few cases

1 every now and then, I think we would be less inclined  
2 to be so concerned, but we continually get cases from  
3 clients saying along the lines that -- The testimony  
4 given, that was pretty extreme with police officers  
5 waiting for her, but that kind of indignation  
6 generated from -- Clients are being intimidated.  
7 They're being talked to in less than respectful ways.  
8 They're being discouraged from applying. We get  
9 numbers of people saying they're going into the Food  
10 Stamp office asking for applications, asking for an  
11 opportunity to apply, and they're being sent on around  
12 the mulberry bush, instead of given the opportunity to  
13 take care of their needs.

14 And so we ask that somehow or another that is  
15 monitored more closely by a regional office or by some  
16 of our offices to ensure that the kind of approach  
17 that we're using to administer human services in our  
18 states is respectful and is considerate and is doing  
19 what -- and the people that are providing the services  
20 are doing what they're supposed to do to ensure that  
21 people's needs are being met.

22 And I want to thank you again for this  
23 opportunity to speak to you.

24 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Sabrina Thomas.

1                   **MS. SABRINA THOMAS:** Good afternoon. I'm here  
2 speaking from a caseworker perspective. I have one  
3 big concern, as far as with a lot of people, as far as  
4 the elderly. I feel that they don't get the adequate  
5 benefits that they need because of their limited  
6 income like Social Security or SSI.

7                   I have a comment to make about the comments that  
8 were just made. I feel that I'm sure she was just  
9 talking about a particular office or whatever, but in  
10 the offices that I've worked in, which has been two  
11 DFACS offices, for the most part, we've never had  
12 those problems, as far as lost information. I'm sure  
13 stuff gets lost, as well as information that's said  
14 that was turned in that really wasn't turned in.

15                  But anyway, from a caseworker's perspective, the  
16 caseworkers that I've dealt with in the offices that  
17 I've been in, everybody serves the clients to the best  
18 of their abilities.

19                  And it's a two-way street. We have a  
20 responsibility to the clients and the clients have a  
21 responsibility to us.

22                  That's all I have to say.

23                  **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Wilbert Morris.

24                  **MR. WILBERT MORRIS:** My name is Wilbert Morris.

1 I'm the program director for the state of North  
2 Carolina and the president of the \$6 Million Club in  
3 the southeast region. I want to thank you for the  
4 opportunity to come and have input around the future  
5 of what I consider to be the country's chief food  
6 assistance program.

7 During much of the Welfare Reform debate in '95  
8 and '96, we heard repeatedly that the Food Stamp  
9 Program must remain as a safety net for the working  
10 poor and families who would be transitioning off the  
11 TANF cash assistance program to employment. Many  
12 embraced that philosophy and still advocate that it  
13 is, in fact, a safety net program.

14 But, as Welfare Reform was implemented, we find  
15 ourselves wondering whether or not the size of the  
16 holes in the net perhaps might be too large and that  
17 families are, in fact, slipping through  
18 inappropriately. Although we're not here today to  
19 debate the Welfare Reform initiative, I see this as an  
20 opportunity though to look at where we are and where  
21 we hope to be in the future with the Food Stamp  
22 Program.

23 One area that does cause some concern is the  
24 allotment determination process for the program. It



1 has changed little since the redesign and the advent  
2 of the Food Stamp Act of 1977. I think it can best be  
3 described as a complex budgeting and calculation  
4 process. I think the program reauthorization provides  
5 an excellent opportunity to assess whether such  
6 procedures and processes are necessary to reach the  
7 desired effect.

8 Perhaps a more reasonable approach is to base  
9 allotments on a process that requires totaling gross  
10 income and subtracting a set percentage of the  
11 household earned income from that total. Step three  
12 of that process would require that we multiply the  
13 results by a percentage that is set at a level that  
14 reflects the amount of gross income that is reasonably  
15 expected to be spent on food by a limited income  
16 household. The final step in the process would  
17 involve tracking the results of the latter step from  
18 the food plan amount. This approach is based on a  
19 premise that food, like housing, is a basic element of  
20 life. The benefits determination process would be  
21 vastly simplified, thereby freeing staff time such  
22 that more time can be devoted to service delivery to  
23 vulnerable households.

24 We've heard quite a bit this afternoon about

1 elderly citizens. We're constantly hearing of  
2 situations where many are choosing not to participate  
3 in the Food Stamp Program because of the limited  
4 benefit that is being received. Perhaps consideration  
5 should be given to waiving income for elderly  
6 households. There are income disregards for working  
7 households but elderly citizens don't benefit from  
8 such consideration. And we'd also like to advocate  
9 that consideration be given to providing all elderly  
10 participants with standard medical deductions.

11 I would also like to just mention briefly the  
12 employment and training aspect of the program. The  
13 focus of the work requirements of the Food Stamp  
14 Program should be changed from one of emphasizing work  
15 registration to one that stresses work activities.  
16 Able bodied adults must continue to be the focus of  
17 this effort, however. But I think a redesigned  
18 program would encourage work, provide healthy able  
19 bodied adults to get and keep a job. Require work  
20 activities and target work activities to certain  
21 individuals, those being the 16 through 59-year-olds.

22 And these would be those that would be most  
23 considered able bodied.

24 And the program might also be available to those

1 who would be willing to volunteer that might be  
2 outside the target population.

3 The program could and should continue to provide  
4 appropriate exemptions, such as for individuals with a  
5 child under age one or the absence of reasonable  
6 childcare, individuals who might still be in school or  
7 working on GED requirements. Participants meeting  
8 appropriate ENT requirements should be given credit  
9 for participating in paid employment, vocational  
10 training, post secondary education, job search, on the  
11 job training, and so forth.

12 As has previously been noted by a number of  
13 speakers, the Food Stamp Program, if it is to be a  
14 safety net for the limited-income households, should  
15 be simplified and coordinated with other benefit  
16 programs. Many families leaving TANF for employment  
17 are finding that their Food Stamp benefits are also  
18 ending because of the vast differences in which  
19 resources are viewed by the various programs. In TANF  
20 programs they tend to be more liberal, while in the  
21 Food Stamp Program with limits of 2,000 and 3,000 are  
22 much more conservative and impacting participation.

23 The state of North Carolina and Mississippi and  
24 other states that you'll find in the southeast do have

1 specific problems related to transportation and the  
2 ability to get and keep jobs without adequate  
3 transportation. As we find in our state, we are  
4 wedded to our vehicles, not necessarily out of choice,  
5 but because we have no other alternatives. It's  
6 necessary in order to obtain and maintain employment.  
7 Particularly as our households transition off welfare,  
8 they're finding that, in order to keep a job, they  
9 must be able to get to the job. So there may be  
10 opportunities to purchase vehicles that may be in  
11 excess of the allowable limits.

12 The current vehicle limit often force families  
13 to make critical choices and they should not have to  
14 make those kinds of choices. The impending  
15 reauthorization clearly provides an opportunity to  
16 reexamine the vehicle policy and hopefully to  
17 implement changes that will allow each participating  
18 household the opportunity to exclude a reliable  
19 vehicle. And that would be regardless of value. At  
20 minimum, we think that there should be a return to the  
21 indexing scale such that the allowable limits will  
22 keep pace with the vehicle cost, as we move forward  
23 into this millennium.

24 Just a couple of comments about the Electronic

1 Benefits Transfer program. I think we all agree that  
2 EBT is a major change in how we operate and none of us  
3 would advocate going, hopefully none of us, will  
4 advocate going back to the coupon system. But I think  
5 that being from the state of North Carolina, and if  
6 you notice the fall of the year, we are like the  
7 bull's-eye for hurricanes that move up the east coast.

8 We believe and we have suggested that the federal  
9 administration of the Disaster EBT Program should be  
10 administered by USDA, rather than by individual  
11 states. We will continue to support and advocate for  
12 this. And our belief is that USDA should negotiate  
13 with vendors in advance and obtain and provide pre-  
14 loaded benefit cards to disaster victims, once  
15 decisions are made to implement disaster programs.  
16 States, of course, would continue to have  
17 responsibility for operating the regular Food Stamp  
18 Program EBT systems.

19 In addition, we believe that some consideration  
20 must be given to more direct involvement by USDA in  
21 contract negotiations for EBT services. State  
22 experiences over the past years, I think certainly  
23 provide perfect examples of what can happen when  
24 states are left to fend for themselves in an area with

1           limited options.

2                     At the southeast region's \$6 Million Club  
3           Conference in Savannah this past month, I had the  
4           opportunity to participate in two town hall sessions.

5           And I was encouraged by the broad based concern  
6           expressed for the future of the program by line  
7           workers, supervisors, and program managers. They  
8           spoke very earnestly and with concern for how the  
9           elderly are being treated and how disabled individuals  
10          are being affected by program rules. They were also  
11          concerned for the struggling single parents who are  
12          trying to remain self-sufficient.

13                    To some extent, I think we all represent the  
14          future of the Food Stamp Program. And I think we have  
15          an opportunity to make it a bright future. Thank you  
16          very much.

17                   **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Wayne Moore.

18                   **MR. WAYNE MOORE:** Good afternoon. My name is  
19          and I'm at the University of Tennessee Knoxville.

20                    Probably the first thing I wanted to comment on  
21          was the changeover from the Food Stamps to the EBT  
22          card. We at the university had the responsibility of  
23          providing DHR with the educational component, the  
24          training component in that transition. Probably one

1 of the things that stood out the most was the fact  
2 that the elderly, those persons who only receive \$10 a  
3 month, we got back from an evaluation several comments  
4 about the fact that they did not want to go through  
5 this big difficult problem switching over from the  
6 Food Stamps to the EBT when I'm only receiving \$10 a  
7 month. So rather than go through that change, they  
8 opted out of the program. So we do not know exactly  
9 how many people have actually opted out of EBT, how  
10 many of the elderly, how many of them are still at  
11 poverty level because they're no longer receiving  
12 benefits.

13 I believe that America's Second Harvest is doing  
14 a tremendous job, along with other donor  
15 organizations, to alleviate poverty. But the question  
16 that we can ask ourselves is what are we doing about  
17 self-sufficiency? Because we can alleviate poverty  
18 but we may not necessarily bring about self-  
19 sufficiency. We are only creating more dependancy.  
20 And, therefore, I think it's important for us to look  
21 at factors that will help in developing self-  
22 sufficiency and looking at it from a more holistic  
23 perspective, not only getting food, but self-  
24 sufficiency in the way of being able to get a job and

1 retain a job and know that I'm becoming more aware of  
2 what I'm doing for myself.

3 And, therefore, when we think of cars, we need  
4 to think of assets, we have to recognize that self-  
5 sufficiency includes not having a sort of a rundown  
6 car that breaks down on the way to work. Someone who  
7 wants to be self-sufficient has to be able to have  
8 enough to survive but has to have an efficiently  
9 running car to get to work.

10 And also has to have and be trained and learn  
11 and recognize the benefit of building up a savings  
12 account, recognizing the benefits of building up  
13 savings from very early so that they will be able to  
14 even have a respectable retirement.

15 So, therefore, like the others, I will echo the  
16 fact that it is important to either wipe away or  
17 increase substantially those limitations on car values  
18 and assets.

19 Also, as we think of self-sufficiency, I think  
20 it's important to obviously link poverty and the  
21 alleviation of poverty with nutrition and with  
22 nutrition education. And I believe that in that  
23 regard we not only need to develop effective programs,  
24 and certainly we do have effective programs, and



1 effective training methods for nutrition programs to  
2 help in the purchasing of proper foods, but we also  
3 need to recognize that there are some people,  
4 regardless of the training they receive, regardless of  
5 the direction they hear, in terms of nutrition, that  
6 are not necessarily motivated to address that fact.  
7 How many of us handle our money exactly how we should,  
8 although we know how we should?

9 And, therefore, I believe that it's important to  
10 look at research that will address this issue. And I  
11 know that the University of Chicago and Northwestern  
12 University have a joint center for poverty research.  
13 And they're actually having a conference coming up  
14 next month looking at non cognitive skills in adult  
15 educational attainment. And, basically, they're  
16 looking at what triggers people to be motivated to do  
17 things, to be motivated to get a better job, to be  
18 motivated to eat better.

19 And I think that these are areas that can be  
20 incorporated in the new -- I hate to say the word Food  
21 Stamp -- but the new Food Stamp initiative. And I  
22 know that it will have a different name by that time.

23 So focusing on not only nutrition but looking at  
24 the individual as a holistic person, a person who

1 wants to have self-sufficiency, not only in food but  
2 in their entire being in their entire family. And,  
3 therefore, looking at what factors can motivate those  
4 folks who still are attending these classes to help  
5 them be better in terms of selecting food but yet not  
6 making the decisions themselves to do so. And I think  
7 that would be an important area to focus on.

8 As we think of the rural communities, I believe  
9 that maybe even in some urban locations people are  
10 left out of the EBT system simply because, well, can I  
11 go to that nice store which sells fresh produce, which  
12 sells fresh food, vegetables and those things that  
13 come ripe from the field. Maybe not because the  
14 grocery store doesn't have the EBT, they don't have  
15 that system that you can call and maybe use the  
16 alternate from the EBT. And, therefore, these rural  
17 people who are already poor are unable to eat  
18 nutritious food because they may not have access to  
19 the food that's so close to them because they have the  
20 Food Stamp, they have the EBT card, but those people  
21 who are going to sell them are not in the system. And  
22 I think that's another area that we can pay some  
23 attention to. Thank you.

24 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. We have a caller on

1 the line. Let me see if I know how to do this. Did I  
2 lose the caller?

3 **MR. CONRAD:** Now try it. Go ahead and speak to  
4 them.

5 **MS. WATKINS:** Hello. Do you want to go ahead  
6 and tell us -- This is Shirley Watkins from USDA and  
7 we're glad you're calling in.

8 **CALLER:** My name is Mike Lee and I'm from Green  
9 County, Alabama. I'm the Food Stamp supervisor here.

10

11 And I'd like to see child support be a mandatory  
12 requirement. And we need to do away with the voter  
13 registration and head of household forms.

14 We need to do something about the vehicles. I  
15 kind of feel like one vehicle should be excluded,  
16 regardless of its use, the same way as we do for TANF  
17 right now.

18 Do away with separate households, increase the  
19 allotment for elderly. And also for elderly, for an  
20 SSI household which is categorically eligible, that  
21 possibly they shouldn't have to do the same processing  
22 because they're already categorically eligible, that  
23 their application process could be just totally  
24 different, just a one-page front and back type of

1        thing, and even extending their certifications for a  
2        period of up to two years.

3                And then also the last thing would be to just  
4        simplify the program in general. I feel like the Food  
5        Stamp Program needs a big overhaul. But one other  
6        thing, I do have one other thing I was thinking about,  
7        that maybe we could do away with all deductions  
8        regardless of, you know, and just have people, the  
9        number of people, and the gross income counted for  
10       Food Stamp allotment because, you know, it's not  
11       really fair for one person to get more Food Stamps  
12       just because they have a higher rent. And that would  
13       be, you know, that goes for even people on a fixed  
14       income. So we could even do away with deductions at  
15       all and just have the number of people and gross  
16       income. Okay?

17               **MS. WATKINS:** Okay. Thank you very much,  
18       caller.

19               **CALLER:** Thank you.

20               **MS. WATKINS:** Bye bye. We have another caller  
21       on the line. Is this fun or what? Hello caller.

22               **CALLER:** Yes, my name is Lenora. And my comment  
23       that I would like to make today is that the state of  
24       Kentucky needs to have a better outreach program for

1 participants who may qualify for the program but have  
2 no idea that they can receive benefits temporarily.

3 **MS. WATKINS:** All right. Thank you very much,  
4 caller. Is that all?

5 **MS. LENORA:** I was also wondering, is there  
6 going to be a videotape of the proceedings?

7 **MS. WATKINS:** There won't be a videotape of the  
8 proceedings but we will have written documentation of  
9 the proceedings. And we will have those available for  
10 use as we move through the reauthorization process and  
11 we're going to document all of the comments so that we  
12 can review those comments and try to incorporate all  
13 of the comments that are made so that we can use that  
14 as a framework for trying to enhance the program.

15 **CALLER:** Now will they be made available on the  
16 Internet?

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Well, we haven't quite decided  
18 that. Are you making that suggestion?

19 **CALLER:** I think that would be a good way to get  
20 these messages out to everyone.

21 **MS. WATKINS:** Well, we'll try and do that.  
22 Thank you very much. You have a great day.

23 Okay, until we get another caller, we'll move  
24 right ahead. Carolyn Pittman. Carolyn Pittman.

1 (Whereupon, there was no response.)

2 Did she leave? Well, if she comes back, we'll  
3 be glad to have her make her comments.

4 Catherine Palambo.

5 **MR. CONRAD:** While Cathy is coming, Betsy, you  
6 have a message.

7 **MS. CATHY PALAMBO:** My name is Cathy Palambo.  
8 I'm from the Atlanta Community Food Bank. We're a  
9 member of America's Second Harvest.

10 I'd like to share with you the results of a  
11 study that we did last year. It's a market basket  
12 survey of a week's worth of menus for a family of four  
13 from the thrifty food plan that we got from a USDA  
14 publication. We went to 52 local grocery stores in  
15 the Atlanta area. We surveyed specifically every item  
16 that was listed in the menus and the recipes with the  
17 menus. And we evaluated what the cost in the  
18 different neighborhoods would be of those menus.

19 The thing that we found was, on average, in  
20 metropolitan Atlanta, which the retailers will tell  
21 you is a very competitive grocery market, that the  
22 average lack in order to purchase the total menu items  
23 was \$55 a week. This is an enormous amount of money  
24 and a great amount of food for a family not to be able

1 to purchase.

2 And it really informed us on two things. One  
3 was the need for the moderate food plan to be used,  
4 rather than the low cost, rather than the thrifty food  
5 plan. The other thing it informed us was that we had  
6 to do a very aggressive advocacy job with our 700  
7 member agencies in 33 counties about the Food Stamp  
8 Program and the services that were available to people  
9 who were going to food pantries and soup kitchens for  
10 meals.

11 And we have discovered, in doing that, that  
12 there are a majority of people, I would say, who don't  
13 know, one, that there's a Food Stamp Program, don't  
14 know, two, what that is, and don't know that they're  
15 eligible.

16 So one of our recommendations would be more  
17 money for outreach around the Food Stamp Program and  
18 very basic outreach. I mean, brochures and people  
19 visiting beauty parlors, barber shops, laundry mats,  
20 places where people congregate, those sorts of things,  
21 application forms in those sorts of places.

22 We put the state's Food Stamp application form  
23 on our food bank Web site and we've encouraged our  
24 food pantries to use that as a model to draw it down

1 and help people fill out the application form so that  
2 they'll know what information they'll have to take to  
3 the DFACS office with them and what questions will be  
4 asked. I think that can be used in a lot of ways in  
5 lots of organizations.

6 And so we would encourage you to think about  
7 Food Stamp outreach, not just through the state  
8 offices but through other nonprofit organizations. We  
9 are very, very concerned about the senior citizen  
10 access to Food Stamps. We know in Fulton County,  
11 which is Atlanta City, that there are 4,000 senior  
12 citizens on the waiting list for Meals on Wheels. And  
13 if we could get adequate Food Stamps to those 4,000  
14 senior citizens, they may be able to eat until Meals  
15 on Wheels is able to serve them, or combine both of  
16 those, at some point.

17 When we think about access to food from a food  
18 security perspective, and think about how we partner  
19 with all the different nutrition programs, both  
20 through USDA and through nonprofit organizations, then  
21 we can address making sure that people are food  
22 secure. And it really has to be that large  
23 conversation with all the partners in the community.  
24 Thank you.



1                   **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Abraham Smith.  
2                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
3                   William Diggs.  
4                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
5                   Solomon Goush.  
6                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
7                   Milton Jones.  
8                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
9                   Doris Bolyn.  
10                  (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
11                  Did they leave? Charles Butts. Good.  
12                  **MR. CHARLES BUTTS:** Good afternoon to all of  
13                  you. My name is Charles Butts. I'm a caseworker with  
14                  the Gwinnett County Department of Family and Children  
15                  Services in Norcross.  
16                  Some of the issues I have, first of all, is with  
17                  the Food Stamp Program. Many times, not to say all  
18                  times that we have, but many times there are some  
19                  clients who just sit on the system and have no -- that  
20                  are not ABODs but have no real desire to be working.  
21                  And I think that the goal of the program is to move  
22                  toward self- sufficiency. And this move toward self-  
23                  sufficiency, I was wondering if there could be  
24                  anything that could be included with the program, that

1 maybe at recertification time, if there could be some  
2 kind of mandate that they would have to look for a job  
3 or something to assist them look for the job as in the  
4 TANF program.

5 And the TANF program, I do TANF, and in the TANF  
6 program, many times, the cases I've had, people are  
7 successful in getting jobs because we have the DOL  
8 workshop and we offer childcare and they have access  
9 to different modes that would get them a job. And if  
10 we could find something for Food Stamps also that  
11 would help them get a job, I think that would move  
12 them toward self- sufficiency also.

13 Secondly, fraudulence I think is a big issue in  
14 the Food Stamp Program, due to the fact that a lot of  
15 the bylaws and the standards that are set on the  
16 program may be based upon statistics and QC findings  
17 on fraudulent cases or cases that have been found in  
18 error. And not to say all people do, once again, but  
19 there are a lot of cases of people that are  
20 discriminated against because of the guidelines that  
21 have been set up, based upon people who have been  
22 fraudulent, based upon the income that they have.  
23 There are a lot of things that we can take the  
24 client's statement on, and when you do that, there are

1 times that people may have more income than they say  
2 or may be living with their spouse, or what have you,  
3 and there's no real way that you can check that. And  
4 so people receive benefits and they shouldn't be. So  
5 next time when it comes around that they have to make  
6 changes to the Food Stamp Program, people that should  
7 get it may not be able to get it.

8 I also want to piggyback on the elderly, and not  
9 to say what everyone else has said, but just to say  
10 that many times we don't recognize the elderly people  
11 sometimes may have been living with a spouse who has  
12 passed away and they get stuck with burial, they get  
13 stuck with a lot of different expenses that they  
14 didn't really plan for. And so, if we could set up  
15 maybe some guidelines or some deductions to not really  
16 penalize them or to take into account that they do  
17 have SSI and Social Security and maybe working with  
18 the death of a spouse, that would help them also.

19 I next wanted to mention about a community maybe  
20 resource list. In Gwinnett County, where I work, we  
21 have a resource list that, if we can't help people to  
22 find benefits, we can refer them, if they're homeless,  
23 to the Homeless Task Force or maybe St. Vincent de  
24 Paul or different people that we know of in the area

1 that may help, the WIC Program, the DOL Workshop,  
2 different places that may help them with their goals  
3 and needs to move them toward self-sufficiency.

4 And, lastly, I want to speak on the system that  
5 the vendors and the recipients were talking about.  
6 People, I hope that people will realize also that when  
7 the system goes down, it renders us incapable of doing  
8 work also. We have a lot of times that, at the end of  
9 the month and the beginning of the month, and  
10 sometimes just at their leisure, the computer will go  
11 down. For what reason, we have no idea. Like this  
12 morning, it was down for three hours or so. And that  
13 lent us time to not be able to do work. The mode of  
14 getting information that we're accustomed to is not  
15 available to us and that lends to problems with people  
16 getting their Food Stamps and being able to use those.  
17 And so, if we could modify maybe the amount of time  
18 that they computer system is down, I think that would  
19 help the program also. Thank you very much.

20 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Computers are  
21 wonderful, until they go down. Is there a caller on  
22 the line? Hello caller.

23 **CALLER:** I would like to make a comment on the  
24 Food Stamp revisions.

1                   **MS. WATKINS:** If you would please identify  
2 yourself.

3                   **CALLER:** Sandra.

4                   **MS. WATKINS:** Sandra, if you want to tell us  
5 where you're from.

6                   **CALLER:** Alabama.

7                   **MS. WATKINS:** Alabama. Go ahead, Sandra from  
8 Alabama.

9                   **CALLER:** I would like to see that people with,  
10 like, felony convictions, not just drug convictions,  
11 all felony convictions, maybe be disqualified from the  
12 program.

13                   **MS. WATKINS:** All right. Is that it?

14                   **CALLER:** That's it.

15                   **MS. WATKINS:** All right, thank you.

16                   Gail Alexander. Come to the mic, please.

17                   **MS. GAIL ALEXANDER:** I was hoping I wouldn't get  
18 called. Good afternoon. My name is Gail Alexander.

19 I'm part of the \$6 Million Club. I represent Alabama.

20 I'm not going to piggyback on the comments that was  
21 already made. We do have a representative from the  
22 state office, which I'm sure she has these same  
23 comments. But while I was sitting, I did come up with  
24 some comments and suggestions of my own.

1           One was stated about the program being named the  
2           Food Stamp Program. So while I was sitting there, I  
3           thought about the FAN Program, which would be the Food  
4           and Nutrition Program, instead of the Food Stamp  
5           Program.

6           Also, I have a love for the young and old  
7           peoples and I have a compassion for the elderly. And  
8           I do have a concern about the benefits for the  
9           elderly. If there would be some way that we could  
10          incorporate the Food Stamps for the elderly with the  
11          Social Security office. Maybe the Social Security  
12          office can qualify those people, when they apply for  
13          Social Security or SSI, because we are looking at,  
14          we're talking about being self-sufficient. When we  
15          talk about the elderly and the disabled people, those  
16          that have retired, they have worked all their life, so  
17          they wasn't looking for a handout or someone to help  
18          them with the food. So I feel like that would be a  
19          bonus to them, if they would be able to just  
20          automatically be awarded Food Stamps, instead of  
21          having to come in and apply.

22          Also, I have, when we talk about that there has  
23          been a decline in the participation, once we look at  
24          increasing the participation, we also need to look at

1 increasing the staff. We talk about accurate and  
2 timely benefit. In order to do that, we will need  
3 staff.

4 And I want to applaud you all for allowing the  
5 little people to listen and have a voice in, you know,  
6 what's being implemented. Thank you.

7 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Mary Meadows. Mary,  
8 did you know Sandra from Alabama?

9 **MS. MARY MEADOWS:** Yes. And also Mike from  
10 Alabama. Mike is in our region. Well, I'm glad I'm  
11 going right after Gail from Alabama.

12 **MS. WATKINS:** Do you want to repeat your name,  
13 please.

14 **MS. MEADOWS:** Mary Meadows from Tuscaloosa  
15 County in Alabama.

16 Two of my concerns, in fact, are for the  
17 elderly. In order to help with the elderly, eliminate  
18 the \$35 deduction for the medical and grant a  
19 deduction for medical for all households whose  
20 Medicare is paid by another government agency such as  
21 QMB.

22 I'd like to continue the ABOD disqualification  
23 activities, continue those.

24 And make a proposal for the households increase

1 in allotment. And I'd like to propose that those be  
2 based on 200 percent of the minimum daily nutritional  
3 requirement, which would result in an increase of the  
4 thrifty food plan and subsequent increase in allotment  
5 for all households. Thank you.

6 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Stephen from the West  
7 Tennessee Legal Services. I didn't try. I'll let you  
8 tell me.

9 **MR. STEPHEN XANTHOPHOLIS:** Well, Madam  
10 Secretary, when I saw you get to Stephen and had that  
11 questioning look on your face, the last name is  
12 Xanthopholis. It's 12 letters and begins with an X.  
13 I'll give a Greek lesson later on what it means.

14 It's a pleasure to be here and I'm sure I'm  
15 speaking for everyone in thanking you for the  
16 invitation to offer some comments on this  
17 conversation. I know some of the things I'm going to  
18 say are sort of beyond your control and they're sort  
19 of administrative, or not administrative but  
20 legislative type issues, but I think they are  
21 important for all of us.

22 One thing is that Food Stamps, for those of us  
23 in the south, are extremely important, and especially  
24 for our clients, in the sense that for a lot of us our



1 standard of need of our public benefits programs are  
2 extremely low and consequently Food Stamps provide a  
3 much greater portion of what people need to survive.

4 Also, our other governmental programs are much  
5 smaller than in other portions of the country, and so  
6 consequently people are much more stressed out in the  
7 things that they need for them and their families to  
8 maintain their viability. So the south is unique.

9 We've heard today a lot of comments about the  
10 complexity of the Food Stamps program. We've heard  
11 from people from the various states. We heard from  
12 Alabama and Mississippi talking about the complexity  
13 of the program. We heard about people from the food  
14 industry talking about the complexity of the program.

15 And these are, they're coming from entities with a  
16 lot of resources. You can imagine, if they're saying  
17 that there's a lot of problems and it's complex, you  
18 can think of the burden that it puts on the recipient,  
19 you know.

20 And especially now when we're talking EBT, we're  
21 talking EFT, we're talking all of these very difficult  
22 changes for a lot of people that might not have the  
23 education that they need.

24 And also people especially from a rural area.

1 My organization serves 17 counties in west Tennessee,  
2 very rural. We have done Food Stamp outreach under  
3 the 50/50 program and some of the discretionary  
4 programs for a number of years, so I applaud you for  
5 doing that. But I think that one of the keys to this  
6 whole issue that we have is education and outreach and  
7 that we, in fact, need more resources in that area.

8 We've heard comments from various people, some  
9 recipients, but also some from other organizations,  
10 talking about the need for education so that  
11 recipients can understand the importance, the health  
12 ramifications, help them to be able to deal with the  
13 complexity of the system. You know, when you have  
14 caseworkers that are overwhelmed by the complexity,  
15 again, imagine the poor recipient. It's just very  
16 difficult.

17 You know, I'm a lawyer. And when I can't sleep  
18 at night I can pull out the Food Regs and I guarantee  
19 you I'll be asleep in ten minutes. And I think that's  
20 for all of us. It's too complex and people need  
21 assistance.

22 But the other thing I would add is not only do  
23 they need the outreach and the education, you need to  
24 be able to provide advocacy for people. There were

1 some changes made in the outreach program a few years  
2 ago that eliminated that. Education alone will not  
3 solve it. It will go a long, long way but, without an  
4 advocacy piece, you're not going to reach those very  
5 hard to reach populations. So I think that that's  
6 really, really key.

7 One of the things, that a lot of your people, at  
8 this point, I think, in terms of EBT and EFT, are very  
9 hard to reach, in the sense that they don't have bank  
10 accounts, you know. The local stores, the mom and pop  
11 operations have not made the transition to the cards  
12 very easily. I mean, we heard the gentleman from  
13 Kroger talking about the problems they've had. If  
14 Kroger is having a problem, heaven help mom and pop  
15 down the street. They're just going to have a real  
16 difficulty.

17 The other thing that I think that you should do  
18 on the outreach is to make the program a lot more  
19 accessible to grassroots organizations. Because I  
20 think a lot of your increase in participation is on a  
21 peer-to-peer basis, okay. You have a lot of community  
22 organizations out there that deal with people in a lot  
23 of issues that would be absolutely wonderful for this  
24 project. And you've done demos that will show that,

1       okay. But you need to think about two things. One,  
2       the 50/50 match is very difficult for them. So think  
3       about that, can you lower that to make it easier for  
4       more mainstream grassroots organizations to help you  
5       engage more people to sign up for those programs.

6               I could go on for a long time because I think  
7       it's a wonderful program. I think we have challenges  
8       but those are the things that I'd like to just  
9       comment. And thank you for sharing this. I hope  
10      that, when you go back and the time comes to twist  
11      arms on Capitol Hill, you can do a good job on that  
12      one.

13             **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Carolyn Morris.

14             **MS. CAROLYN MORRIS:** Hi, I'm Carolyn Morris, and  
15      I'm a Food Stamp supervisor.

16             **MS. WATKINS:** You know what, it's so great to be  
17      back in the south.

18             **MS. MORRIS:** In southeast Georgia is where I  
19      work. And a lot of the things that I had to say have  
20      already been said, but I just want you to understand  
21      the broad support for these issues, so I will go  
22      ahead.

23             I think that we could use a deduction on  
24      disability income. I think that the shelter deduction

1 could be made a lot easier if you had one standard  
2 utility deduction for anyone who pays utilities,  
3 period. It would simplify the workings of the  
4 program.

5 I think that we should have a standard medical  
6 deduction, also, for the elderly.

7 And I also agree about excluding one vehicle  
8 totally. What is in place now is not sufficient.  
9 They have to be able to have a decent car in order to  
10 work and to do their daily business.

11 I would also like to see, there were comments  
12 about the recertification process, which is a problem  
13 for all of us. And I think that we might have more  
14 people not just opt out of the program if you could do  
15 alternate reviews every other time. The working  
16 people have to come in every three months. And if  
17 they could mail in a recertification on the middle  
18 month and only come in every six months, we might have  
19 more continuous participation, instead of all the  
20 on/off of the program that's going on. And it would  
21 make everything simpler for the workers and the  
22 clients.

23 I also have ultimate simplification, like the  
24 man from Alabama. Just have an income limit, number

1 of people, number of Food Stamps. It would take away  
2 a lot of the errors.

3 One other thing I wanted to say, just because I  
4 was a participant in the \$6 Million Club, and there  
5 seem to be some people not understanding about what  
6 was causing the decline in the Food Stamp rolls. And  
7 I have seen it directly so many times where, in my  
8 small town that I'm from, it used to be if you got a  
9 job you were lucky and you kept it. But now with the  
10 economy being so good, they're changing jobs so often  
11 and they're just not verifying. They're not providing  
12 the verification that's required. And, you know,  
13 these are eligible people, people that are eligible  
14 for the program, if they would just provide the  
15 verification and they're not opting to. I just think  
16 that it's not that they don't know that they're  
17 eligible. It's that they just feel, you know, the  
18 frustration with the program and what we're asking  
19 them to do. Thank you.

20 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. What's the \$6 Million  
21 Club? These gentlemen are sitting over there  
22 whispering to each other, what's the \$6 Million Club.

23 **MR. CONRAD:** The \$6 Million Club is a group of  
24 counties that issue more than \$6 million of Food Stamp

1           benefits. And in the southeast, that's 169 counties,  
2           out of the 735, that have joined together to manage  
3           the program with excellence.

4           **MS. WATKINS:** Okay, now we're on the same  
5           wavelength. Okay. Mary Jo Dennison.

6           **MS. MARY JO DENNISON:** You'll have to excuse the  
7           way I sound. I woke up this morning with laryngitis.

8           **MS. WATKINS:** Do you want to tell us your name.

9           **MS. DENNISON:** Mary Jo Dennison. I'm from  
10          Huntsville, Alabama. It's Madison County. I'm here  
11          again to express concern over the elderly. Some of  
12          our case managers felt that there should be a work  
13          deduction for the elderly who get regular Social  
14          Security because either they or a spouse had earned  
15          that income.

16                 I'm also concerned about the vehicle policy. We  
17          expect people to work but we don't expect them to have  
18          decent transportation to get back and forth to work.

19                 Huntsville has kind of a unique problem maybe to  
20          some of the other counties in that we're a high tech  
21          county. We have a lot of engineers and highly  
22          educated people who are in our workforce.  
23          Occasionally, Huntsville, as other areas, experience  
24          recessions. During that time, those individuals who

1 have worked all of their lives come to our office in  
2 hopes to get benefits from us. Many of them have  
3 401Ks that are their retirement and we deny them  
4 because of their 401Ks.

5 What we are suggesting, in our county, is that  
6 perhaps there be a three-month waiver of counting  
7 retirement accounts. During that three-month period,  
8 if an individual doesn't get a job, they're going to  
9 start losing their cars and losing their homes and  
10 everything else and they're going to need to get into  
11 the retirement account, at that point. But we  
12 thought, if there could be a three-month exemption,  
13 that they could partake in a program and perhaps that  
14 would improve the image of the program.

15 Because you have many people who come in who  
16 say, I've worked all my life, I've come in for  
17 benefits, you won't give me anything.

18 Also, our county participated in a pilot Welfare  
19 Reform project called Assets. And it's now dissolved.

20 But, during that period, we did not refer to the Food  
21 Stamp Program as the Food Stamp Program. It was the  
22 Nutrition Assistance Program. And, personally, I like  
23 that title a lot better than Food Stamps. And that's  
24 the one part of that program in our county we still



1 refer to it as Nutrition Assistance.

2 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Vicky Johnson.

3 (Whereupon, there was no response.)

4 Marilyn Milney.

5 (Whereupon, there was no response.)

6 Karo Shanahan.

7 **MS. KARO SHANAHAN:** My name is Karo Shanahan,  
8 and I'm the director of the Alabama Food Stamp Program  
9 in the Department of Human Resources.

10 Basically, everything has already been said but  
11 I would like to reiterate it because it is so  
12 important.

13 If I had to use one word it is simplify. We  
14 would like to overall have a simplification of the  
15 program. We think this would lead to greater  
16 accessibility.

17 We would like to increase the minimum benefit  
18 from \$10 to \$25 and implement a standard medical  
19 deduction. We recommend a minimum \$50 deduction, with  
20 provisions for greater expenses, if verified.

21 We would like to change the resource policy to  
22 be more in line with today's cost of living,  
23 especially regarding vehicles, which everybody here  
24 has mentioned.

1           We think that simplification of definitions and  
2           federal policy interpretations that are error prone  
3           and confusing to households would be very beneficial.

4           We would like to simplify the eligibility  
5           determination process by using gross income and  
6           standard allotments, based on income increments and  
7           household size.

8           We would like to reexamine the complexity added  
9           to the program by the special treatment for certain  
10          groups. A suggestion is to subsidize through other  
11          means or certify the provider as a household for  
12          everyone living under the same roof.

13          We suggest providing 100 percent outreach  
14          funding to assist the states in eliminating access  
15          barriers.

16          We would like to adequately fund employment and  
17          training and to abolish the ABOD rules and strengthen  
18          work requirements, such as decreasing the age work  
19          exemptions in the TANF program.

20          We would like to eliminate the EBT funding  
21          restrictions, and provide a 50/50 match for cost.

22          We would like to provide financial incentives to  
23          pursue EBT recipient disqualifications due to  
24          fraudulent activity.

1           We would like to provide retention funding for  
2 administrative error claims.

3           We would like to see improvement in the  
4 coordination between FNS and other federal agencies  
5 that have impact on the program, particularly HHS.

6           We would like to encourage categorical Medicaid  
7 eligibility for pregnant women and children receiving  
8 Food Stamps. And we think that this would be an  
9 important link to improving the health for low-income  
10 families.

11           We would like to retain the state option to  
12 require child support as a condition of Food Stamp  
13 eligibility.

14           And, last, we would like to see an increase in  
15 the coordination at the national level between USDA  
16 and SSA to assure access to nutrition assistance by  
17 the nation's elderly and disabled.

18           And we really appreciate the opportunity to be  
19 here. Thank you for listening.

20           **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. We've been here now  
21 listening. We started at 1:15. I wonder if you'd  
22 like to take just about a ten-minute break.

23           (Whereupon, a choir of voices responded.)

24           **MS. WATKINS:** You would. Good. Why don't we

1 take a ten-minute break and be back in here at 3:25.  
2 The cafeteria will be open until 4:00, so if you want  
3 to go over to the cafeteria and get a drink.

4 (Whereupon, a break was taken from 3:15 p.m. to  
5 3:25 p.m.)

6 **MS. WATKINS:** We took a little bit longer. I  
7 know you feel as much relieved as I do, having an  
8 opportunity to go out and stand up walk around and  
9 visit. This is going so great. Again, I want to  
10 thank all of you for your participation and to thank  
11 the staff for doing such a super job.

12 We're going to get started. We have Jane Walker  
13 and Sr. Rosemarie.

14 **MS. JANE WALKER:** Good afternoon. Thanks to  
15 Virgil Conrad we're here, otherwise we wouldn't have  
16 known about it. He was at the EAT Conference in  
17 Florida a couple of weeks ago, and made sure that  
18 everybody got an announcement of this. So we didn't  
19 get it until late.

20 We are from St. Petersburg, Florida. My name is  
21 Jane Walker from the St. Petersburg Free Clinic.  
22 We're a community organization that provides medical  
23 care. We're an independent food bank, not part of the  
24 Second Harvest network, but we provide billions of

1 pounds of food in our community. We have a food  
2 pantry and community kitchen.

3 And, Sr. Rosemarie, do you --

4 **SR. ROSEMARIE:** I'm Sr. Rosemarie and I'm a  
5 director of a food pantry, an independent food pantry  
6 in St. Petersburg, Florida. And I want to thank you  
7 all for allowing us to be here.

8 (Whereupon, a banner was presented.)

9 **MS. WALKER:** When we found out about it, we knew  
10 everybody couldn't come up here so we decided to have  
11 our own local conversation and bring the comments back  
12 to you. So we tried, within our community, we tried  
13 to get a good representation of who was there. We  
14 made quite a few phone calls. At such short notice,  
15 about 25 different groups showed up representing  
16 homeless, elderly, disabled, single parents,  
17 developmental disabilities, domestic violence,  
18 grandparents raising grandchildren, just a whole  
19 variety of issues. And we came up with quite a few.

20 One of the reasons that we decided to do it that  
21 way is we know, probably the same way you do, that the  
22 more you hear out loud yourself the more it generates  
23 other ideas and other ways of looking at things. So  
24 we called together our community for that reason.

1           Some of the things that came up, within our  
2           local community, also came up, has been coming up very  
3           strongly here. The vehicle asset, the vehicle limits  
4           was a big one and everybody was in agreement on that  
5           one.

6           Not everything on here was agreed upon by  
7           everybody, but we wanted to include everybody's  
8           comments, just like you would, whether they were able  
9           to be here or not.

10          One of the other things that went along with  
11          eliminating or raising the asset level or raising the  
12          value level of the vehicle was also to allow  
13          indebtedness on a vehicle if it is over whatever  
14          income it is, because a lot of these folks are working  
15          or paying for a car or trying to buy a car that's  
16          decent enough to get them to work.

17          In listening here, and in some of the discussion  
18          in our state, and we did have Food Stamp folks there  
19          with us to help us in our discussion, we felt as a  
20          group that states should not be allowed to make more  
21          restrictions than allowed federally. There are a lot  
22          of problems that we had within the state that we found  
23          out had nothing to do with the Food Stamp Program on a  
24          national level. It was what our state was choosing to

1 do. And we don't think that anything should be up to  
2 the state's, as far as that goes, because that is  
3 eliminating a lot of our folks.

4 The limited amount that elderly and disabled are  
5 allowed to get, the minimum of \$10 was a real big  
6 discussion point among all of us. And one of the  
7 suggestions they had is, if it can't be raised, at  
8 least let them get it in maybe a lump sum for their  
9 certification period so that it feels like more and  
10 they've got a little bit more to work with at one time  
11 that they could put to better use.

12 The emergency Food Stamps issue came up quite a  
13 bit, how to get the card immediately. One of the  
14 comments was the more states that are involved, the  
15 more communities that are involved, the longer it  
16 takes to get the EBT cards because there's more people  
17 to mail them to. Something needs to be brought down  
18 to get that local access much quicker. As well as  
19 folks who have no homes or unstable homes, that need  
20 to have a mailing address, that local offices need  
21 some kind of mandate pressure, something that they  
22 have a community partner that will act as a mailing  
23 address. We understood from the Food Stamp people  
24 that they didn't feel like their offices could be that

1 because of the possibility of fraud or some other kind  
2 of hanky-panky going on. But that at least somebody  
3 in the community -- Our agencies do that, but we know  
4 there are communities that don't have that.

5 The ABODs, again, we're eliminating the ABOD  
6 rules. We deal with a lot of people who may be able  
7 bodied but not able minded and they do not get the  
8 disability ratings. We can't get them in to doctors.

9 They're not going to admit they have those kind of  
10 problems that would keep them from getting a job, but  
11 they're also the kind of people that don't keep jobs,  
12 for that reason. It's causing quite a hardship on  
13 people.

14 You've got a list of all of them up there. The  
15 one that personally I wanted to stress though is we  
16 have a grandparents raising grandchildren group. And  
17 for relative care givers, there should be an exception  
18 to including them on the grants. If they choose not  
19 to -- A lot of these grandparents have worked all of  
20 their life. They have built up some assets. They  
21 find themselves in a position to need to take these  
22 grandchildren, either because of death, disability,  
23 incarceration, or just plain irresponsibility of these  
24 folks. A lot of times they do have a decent car that



1       they've saved up to get. They get the children in the  
2       home. They don't have the excess to meet it. They  
3       don't get the same kind of consideration foster  
4       parents do but they're also struggling everyday to  
5       meet the needs of these children. And it would be  
6       very hard to show that they're eating separately and  
7       some of those other rules, but they are taking on  
8       these children and do have an added responsibility.

9               And allowing for anything dental related in the  
10       Food Stamp eligibility, because that is an extremely  
11       important part of the nutrition, is good teeth. So  
12       toothpaste, which they used to be able to buy with the  
13       stamps with a few extra dollars. But teeth, dentures,  
14       anything that's mouth related that might cause a  
15       problem in eating food prepared.

16              Sr. Rosemarie, did you have some additional?

17              **SR. ROSEMARIE:** The Fork Act.

18              **MS. WALKER:** Okay. And we also strongly support  
19       the Fork Act and the Hunger Relief Act. That would  
20       make a big difference to all the folks that we serve.

21       Thank you.

22              **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. The two of them are  
23       going to try to get back to Florida now. Thanks very  
24       much.

1                   Alexis Pauline, and I can't read that. I don't  
2 know if it says Gimms, Crimms.  
3                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
4                   Well, good, she's not here to know I messed up  
5 her name.  
6                   I guess this is Bobby Letts.  
7                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
8                   Rosalyn Nixon.  
9                   (Whereupon, there was no response.)  
10                  Yolanda Douglas.  
11                  **MS. YOLANDA DOUGLAS:** Good afternoon. My name  
12 is Yolanda Douglas, and I'm a supervisor at the Fulton  
13 County DFACS office. I'm here today because I am an  
14 advocate for the working poor, students, and also the  
15 elderly.  
16                  There are so many stipulations. We talk about  
17 people becoming self-sufficient, and when people try  
18 to become self-sufficient, the income levels are so  
19 low that they're unable to get the supplement of Food  
20 Stamps that's needed to assist the family. When we  
21 talk about working, we talk about you need to work to  
22 become self-sufficient. Well, if I work, I'm not able  
23 to receive Food Stamps. And, if I'm working, I want  
24 to try to provide a safe home environment for my

1 family to live in, which means ultimately my rent is  
2 more. But, if I don't work, I can receive the full  
3 benefit amount and receive food stamps and my family  
4 can eat. So what kind of choices do we have, you  
5 know, if we look at that, to say, you know, should we  
6 work or, you know, to feed our families, or not work  
7 and receive, you know, everything that the family can  
8 receive. So we really need to look at the limits, the  
9 income limits for families.

10 Also, for elderly, the \$10 amount for SSI  
11 recipients, these are people or Social Security people  
12 who have worked all of their lives who need  
13 assistance. And the \$10 or the low amount of Food  
14 Stamps they receive is not enough to assist with the  
15 family.

16 And I know these are some of the things that  
17 people have already said, but they are very important.  
18 Thank you.

19 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. I'd like to remind you  
20 again that you do have an opportunity to submit  
21 written comments through the end of August. And we'll  
22 be accepting written comments. So if you don't get a  
23 chance to say everything that you wanted to say today,  
24 just remember you can provide written comments. And

1           you can also send us comments via e-mail, if you would  
2           like.

3           Tara Harrison.

4           **MS. TARA HARRISON:** Hello, I'm Tara Harrison  
5           from the Department of Family and Children Services,  
6           located here in Atlanta.

7           My concern is in raising the resource limit on  
8           vehicles, which is one that has already been stated.  
9           Basically, right now the standard deduction stands at  
10          4,650 and a lot of the clients that come into the  
11          office aren't eligible based on the fact that their  
12          vehicle or the price of their vehicle is too high.  
13          So, basically, mine is on raising the income limit for  
14          the -- not the income limit but the deduction on  
15          vehicles. That's basically it. Thank you.

16          **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Nancy Linbloom.

17          **MS. NANCY LINBLOOM:** Thank you for the  
18          opportunity to speak here today. I am Nancy Linbloom.  
19          I'm an attorney with the Georgia Legal Services  
20          program, and I'm based in Athens, Georgia. My  
21          comments today, and I will, in the interest of time,  
22          I'm not going to go over areas. I'm going to just  
23          zero in on two what I think are very critical areas  
24          where we have had clients, specific clients incurring

1 problems.

2 And the first area is access. I appreciate what  
3 everyone else was saying about certainly there are  
4 back-end comments, which is you're eligible for Stamps  
5 and you're hitting the problems when you're in the  
6 grocery store line and having problems there. There  
7 are certainly issues involved with just becoming  
8 eligible for the program. But I'm more, I wanted to  
9 raise here today some of the problems that have come  
10 up with our clients, which is just accessing the  
11 system to begin with or, once you're on, getting  
12 information back and forth. Specifically, let me give  
13 you some examples that come from clients, and also  
14 from our local offices in the large urban counties in  
15 Georgia, because the legal services or legal aid phone  
16 number appears on any notice that goes out to the  
17 client about you're eligible, you're not eligible,  
18 your benefits are going up and down. The legal  
19 services phone number for that particular area shows  
20 up on that notice. And it's fairly close to the main  
21 telephone line number for the larger urban county  
22 DFACS offices. What's happened, over the last year,  
23 is that the receptionist in legal services, we asked  
24 them to start logging the calls coming in from people

1 who were trying to get through to the large urban  
2 county DFACS offices on the main line and could not.  
3 And because our number was there and was local, they'd  
4 call that number.

5 And you might say, well, what's the big deal  
6 about that. Well, the big deal is that these are  
7 coming in at 90 to 100 calls a day to our office for  
8 people who can't get through. And because the Food  
9 Stamp Program, as I know you all well know, has got,  
10 in your federal regs, provides for the necessity for a  
11 client's responsibility to make reports of things,  
12 anything, there needs to be that ability to get  
13 through that remains a major problem.

14 In addition, elderly clients have been mentioned  
15 here frequently. We had an elderly client who was  
16 told now interviews are conducted for Food Stamps in a  
17 group. That is, you go in and you wait. You're in  
18 there with a group when you're asked to go through the  
19 application and take information. She decided that  
20 she wasn't going to do that. Her privacy was  
21 important to her and she thought she should not have  
22 to go through a process like that.

23 Thirdly, just the offices themselves. I realize  
24 that the department has made a major effort recently

1 to look at access issues from the point of view of  
2 good ideas, best practices that can be shared with the  
3 states. But I would raise a concern of what are some  
4 of those minimal issues or minimal standards, if you  
5 will, to make sure access is in place.

6 Let me give you an example. I was down in  
7 Chatham County, Georgia, which is Savannah, Georgia,  
8 in the last year and went over with some other people  
9 to a meeting and literally, as you walk through the  
10 door, not even as far as the flip chart stand is  
11 there, the first thing you see, and I had to look to  
12 make sure, I thought it was a policeman initially, but  
13 is a security guard. You can't go left. You can only  
14 go right and you can only go into the office, after  
15 you go through seeing him. And I raised issues  
16 because I know there's great concern in Washington and  
17 elsewhere about why are the Food Stamp rolls  
18 declining. But I think that also has an impact, in  
19 terms of access issues.

20 The other aspect of access is verification.  
21 Several people have alluded to this. In some of those  
22 larger urban county offices, for example, you know  
23 there's nothing anywhere in the regs that says, if I  
24 bring in the verification, that the Food Stamp

1 recipient is to get something indicating, yes, you  
2 brought it in on whatever date.

3 In one of the large urban counties I spoke  
4 about, where everything is glassed in, that is, when  
5 you go through, there's glassed in small areas to  
6 speak to people. There was a large cardboard box that  
7 sat in the middle of the room. It didn't have  
8 anything special to it. Just a large cardboard box.  
9 What we found out was that's where you're supposed to  
10 put verification or anything that was supposed to go  
11 to the worker. I mean, in other words, just toss it  
12 in. How are you going to know that it made it  
13 through? How do you prove you dropped it off?

14 In addition, I would raise with you, although  
15 it's been alluded to before, when people have been  
16 talking about the car issue and the value of a car,  
17 that many times Food Stamp recipients have  
18 transportation problems getting back and forth to the  
19 DFACS office. So the more that they have to make  
20 repeated visits, that is going in once and get told  
21 come back tomorrow, that may sound simple but it may  
22 not be, in terms of working out a ride to be able to  
23 get there, or to get a piece of verification or a  
24 piece of paper back into the DFACS office. And I



1 think that is also crucial.

2 Finally, I'm going to let one of my colleagues  
3 talk about bilingual issues and problems in the  
4 program and her experience there.

5 But I also wanted to raise an access, and in  
6 particularly elderly people and disabled people,  
7 because it came up also with EBT. Unlike the Maryland  
8 EBT pilot program, where elderly and disabled people  
9 had the opportunity to opt out of using EBT, if they  
10 didn't feel comfortable or didn't want to have to  
11 master using the system, that hasn't been done. Nor,  
12 to my knowledge, was there ever any kind of more  
13 specialized training offered to those groups of people  
14 to make them comfortable with the system.

15 Secondary, and my last one, I'll keep this  
16 brief, has to do with fraud. I believe one of the  
17 Alabama Food Stamp people alluded to that, to the  
18 incentive, the fiscal incentive system that's been in  
19 place so that states actually -- For people who don't  
20 know, the fiscal incentives mean that because Food  
21 Stamps represent pure 100 percent federal dollars,  
22 when overpayments are collected and financial  
23 incentives are in place, the state gets to keep a  
24 certain percentage of monies collected. It is a

1 higher percentage of monies that are kept, if the  
2 overpayment is due to fraud or intentional program  
3 violations. So there is a fiscal incentive in place  
4 to do that.

5 I would offer back to you, in terms of a  
6 rethinking, to look at that from clients who have been  
7 impacted by this, both at what are called front-end  
8 fraud investigators, about the prevalence of  
9 unannounced home visits. We literally -- And,  
10 unannounced, I say that specifically, in terms in  
11 light of the Food Stamp regs and law specifically  
12 saying that they are to be announced, not just show up  
13 or show up and expect the client to either be there or  
14 return a call within a one-hour period or their  
15 benefits are denied. It happened to another client  
16 who was going to have tried to make it here today.

17 I think the other thing I'd say about fraud, and  
18 I want to reference back to Ms. Foster, and power to  
19 her for coming all the way up here from Macon to  
20 testify about what happened to her. Just so you are  
21 clear, because Georgia Legal Services is still is  
22 trying to work with her, is when she went into, the  
23 Food Stamp worker had her, told her she had to go into  
24 a separate room for the interview with the two

1 policemen in that room. Not in the outer area, not  
2 within providing general security. She told her that  
3 that was the way the interview had to be conducted.  
4 This was approved higher up within the Bibb County  
5 DFACS department, not just for her, but for other  
6 clients as well. And they conceded that there wasn't  
7 anything specific. Ms. Foster hadn't made a threat.  
8 There was nothing specific. And you saw her reaction,  
9 which is, wait a minute, you know, why should I go  
10 through this.

11 And I think that, coupled with the department's  
12 regulations right now which, in the fraud area,  
13 provides shortcuts for the states to use to get fraud  
14 findings on overpayment and signing waivers of your  
15 right to a hearing, for example.

16 I'd encourage you, we just had another case come  
17 in like this, to take a look, because the department  
18 is allowing states to use those shortcuts to fraud  
19 determinations, to look at the forms themselves people  
20 are being asked to sign.

21 Computer software can now tell you what reading  
22 level is required, what grade level would be needed to  
23 understand those forms. And the forms being utilized  
24 in Georgia require several years of college-level

1 education to understand, yet they're being used at  
2 quite a, on an extensive basis, not case by case.

3 I would also offer to you the stats and info  
4 that you put out about overpayments and fraud. You  
5 can note that Georgia, which makes widespread use of  
6 those waiver forms, and the other shortcut, a  
7 disqualification consent agreement, has extremely high  
8 numbers. I think actually on numbers of those signed  
9 it's probably higher than California. But I would  
10 assert to you that that's not because people in  
11 Georgia who are trying to get Stamps are any more  
12 likely than anyone else to have committed fraud.

13 Given the tougher standards that are in place  
14 for fraud disqualifications, including an ultimate  
15 lifetime of banishment from the program, I would urge  
16 USDA to take a hard look at those issues. Thank you.

17 I know I talked a long time.

18 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much. We have a  
19 caller on the line. Caller, are you there?

20 **CALLER:** Yes, I am.

21 **MS. WATKINS:** This is Shirley Watkins with USDA.

22 If you would tell us who you are, you can go ahead  
23 and give us your thoughts on Food Stamp Program  
24 reauthorization.

1                   **CALLER:** All right. My name is Sherry from  
2 Alabama. And I just had one comment on the vehicles.  
3 I think that we should increase the amount that's  
4 subtracted from the Vehicle Blue Book to get the fair  
5 market value. Move it up to \$10,000 instead of that  
6 4,650.

7                   **MS. WATKINS:** All right, thank you, Sherry from  
8 Alabama.

9                   **CALLER:** Thank you.

10                  **MS. WATKINS:** We have another caller on the  
11 line.

12                  **MR. CONRAD:** They hung up, Shirley.

13                  **MS. WATKINS:** Okay, they hung up. They have to  
14 be patient with us. All right, we'll wait and maybe  
15 they'll call us back.

16                  Yvette Munroe.

17                  (Whereupon, there was no response.)

18                  Kimberly Smith.

19                  (Whereupon, there was no response.)

20                  Laura Lester.

21                  **MS. LAURA LESTER:** Hi, I'm Laura Lester, and I  
22 work with Atlanta Legal Aide, and I specifically work  
23 up in Cobb County. I'm a staff attorney.

24                  First off, because I'd like to believe we're

1 voting toward something here, I'd like for y'all to  
2 make another mark down on the vehicle exemption issue.

3 **MS. WATKINS:** You must be looking at what I'm  
4 doing as I check off.

5 **MS. LESTER:** No, it was just a hopeful guess.

6 The one issue that I'm going to talk about, that  
7 Nancy alluded to earlier, is an issue that's come up  
8 in our county, in Cobb County specifically, especially  
9 in the last year. We have an exploding Spanish  
10 speaking population in Cobb County that I think  
11 everyone is trying to learn how to deal with,  
12 including our office. What I'd like to speak to is  
13 trying to get increased funding to help local offices  
14 deal with the access issues, the barriers to access  
15 for these people who speak Spanish.

16 What happened in our office, we started getting  
17 calls last fall, in particular, from a number of  
18 Spanish speaking applicants who called our office to  
19 say that they would call the local DFACS office and  
20 someone would say something to them and then simply  
21 they would be hung up on. When I contacted the local  
22 DFACS office myself to sort of see what was going on,  
23 I was told that, yes, you know, we'll tell the person  
24 who calls up and asks if anyone speaks English, I'm

1       sorry, if anyone speaks Spanish, that, no, nobody  
2       speaks Spanish. And then they would hang up the  
3       phone. When we brought this to the attention of the  
4       local DFACS office in Cobb County, they were  
5       appropriately horrified. And they're all sitting over  
6       there, actually.

7               And we all sat down together and we talked about  
8       some ways to come up to solve this problem. And we  
9       came up with three, I think, really good ideas: trying  
10      to get a full-time translator in the office, trying to  
11      get an automated phone system, press 1 for English, 2  
12      for Spanish. And the third idea was to ask the state  
13      for increased funding to give the two caseworkers that  
14      were already in the office who spoke Spanish a small,  
15      small raise so they could take on most of the Spanish  
16      speaking clients.

17             I would just like to point out that it took  
18      months of their begging, coupled with several threats  
19      from our office, before they were able to get the  
20      funding for at least two of these ideas. And there  
21      now is a translator in the office. The phone system  
22      is in place. And they still, however, cannot get the  
23      approval for the raise. Apparently it's been approved  
24      for new hires but not for the people who are already

1 on staff. It's a simple solution to a problem, a huge  
2 problem for the Spanish speaking population and they  
3 can't get it. So that's what I'd like to comment on.

4 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much. Catherine  
5 Davis.

6 **MS. CATHERINE DAVIS:** Hello. I'm Cathy Davis  
7 from the regional office here of Health Services and  
8 Resources Administration. And I would like -- Thank  
9 you for inviting me to come to testify on Food Stamps.  
10 I think it's a good idea.

11 I think that one of the things, as a  
12 nutritionist, I like that people have the choice to  
13 pick anything they want in the supermarket, whether  
14 it's nutritious or not, because Americans like choice.

15 So that makes this a very good American program.  
16 However, as a health professional, I would like to put  
17 in a plug for taking some money off the top for  
18 population-based nutrition education. It could be  
19 targeted toward low income and Food Stamps, but I  
20 think we need some adequate nutrition education out  
21 there.

22 In my job as a nutritionist, I work with  
23 maternal and child health. We're very closely related  
24 to WIC. If you're pregnant or under five and you have



1 nutritional risk and you're low income, you can get to  
2 a nutritionist. But that's about it. The primary  
3 care centers that we deal with in HRSA, we see a lot  
4 of low-income people. The big problems we see are  
5 obesity, diabetes, hypertension, lipid problems, all  
6 of them related to nutrition. We need nutrition  
7 education for the population as a whole, not done by  
8 companies who have interests in selling you something,  
9 if you like their nutrition education. We need  
10 scientific-based information.

11 At this meeting, we've heard a lot about the  
12 elderly and that's very important, especially the new  
13 elderly or the middle-aged who are having problems  
14 with obesity, hypertension and diabetes. And,  
15 basically, I think we need to prepare the baby boomers  
16 for getting old. Baby boomers have done nothing  
17 quietly, nor will we get old quietly. And we need  
18 nutrition education services. There's a lot of new  
19 nutrition information out there. There are a lot of  
20 supplements being pushed. The only education being  
21 provided is by companies that are selling you  
22 something. So I think we need nutrition ed.

23 One of the nutrition ed sources we used to use  
24 is extension, which is in farm communities. Well,

1 we're not really going toward a farm society. We are  
2 in the information age. This is a time when you buy  
3 your groceries on the computer. So it's almost like  
4 writing food specs to buy your groceries. But anyway,  
5 we need nutrition information to help us. With TANF  
6 and the Welfare Reform, we're pushing families back  
7 into the working society. You only have five years to  
8 be on welfare. And it's hard to be a working mom and  
9 to buy good food. So we need some nutrition ed to  
10 help us. So I'd appreciate if you'd put that in.

11 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much. Dorothy  
12 Sankey.

13 **MS. DOROTHY SANKEY:** Good evening. I'm Dorothy  
14 Sankey. I'm newly appointed, as of July 3, as the  
15 program supervisor for Montgomery County.

16 The few suggestions that our county have to  
17 improve the Food Stamp Program are, number one, please  
18 give us, ensure that each county is adequately  
19 staffed, in order to render service to our clients.  
20 The counties, and in specific Montgomery County, we  
21 desperately need many good social workers to process  
22 cases to determine eligibility. The county staffs, we  
23 are the front line. We are like the Marines on the  
24 front line of this hunger war. We're taking all the

1       bullets from the clientele that we serve. We are  
2       truly the few.

3               Although we are few in number, we are mission  
4       oriented. I look at the Food Stamp Program as a  
5       ministry because the hungry will always be with us.  
6       So we who remain are truly in it to help feed the less  
7       fortunate. The poor will always be with us.  
8       Therefore, a new, improved, more efficient, better  
9       managed Food Stamp Program will always be needed.

10              In the county, it's like a snowball effect. You  
11       have decreased staff, increased caseload, decreased  
12       staff, increased phone calls, due to insufficient  
13       staff, stressed out workers who find less stressful  
14       jobs, angry clients who can't receive food assistance  
15       in a timely manner. We, the county, want to deliver  
16       service efficiently and timely but, without proper  
17       staff, we cannot.

18              Montgomery County has close to 10,000 active  
19       cases. We used to have about 30 workers but now we're  
20       down to 13 workers, lost one just yesterday, with  
21       caseloads close to 750 approaching 800 cases per  
22       worker. This is due to continuous loss of staff, with  
23       no additional new staff.

24              So, number two, we need a clear, precise, user-

1 friendly functional Food Stamp manual to avoid policy  
2 misinterpretation.

3 Number three, there is discussion to abolish  
4 ABOD work registration requirements. It is true that  
5 the ABOD policy needs to be revised and one revision  
6 that is needed is to give the able bodied person more  
7 assistance locating work or finding jobs. But, if  
8 ABOD work registration requirements are abolished, it  
9 most definitely will increase the caseload for an  
10 already understaffed Food Stamp Program.

11 Number four, the vehicle resource limit needs to  
12 be set more realistic to meet the increased cost of  
13 automobiles. Our clients would be helped if we  
14 excluded one vehicle and applied fair market value to  
15 any remaining vehicles. This would enhance the  
16 client's ability to join the workforce, since we are  
17 encouraging our clients to go to work.

18 Number five, utilize the jobs program and the  
19 child support program. Make it a requirement for the  
20 Food Stamp Program that clients eligible for these  
21 services participate.

22 And the last thing is, provide us with ongoing  
23 refresher training.

24 So, in summary, my six points are, number one,

1 staff. Number two, user-friendly Food Stamp manuals.  
2 Number three, revise the ABOD policy versus  
3 abolishing due to increased caseload for understaffed  
4 counties. Number four, set realistic vehicle resource  
5 limit. Number five, incorporate jobs and the child  
6 support programs as a Food Stamp requirement. And,  
7 last, consistent training.

8 Thank you for your time and concern for  
9 soliciting our input and feedback from the people who  
10 actually work with the clients in the Food Stamp  
11 Program. I trust, hope, and pray that our suggestions  
12 will help to improve the Food Stamp Program. Thank  
13 you.

14 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. We have a caller on  
15 the line. Hello, caller, this is Shirley Watkins.

16 **CALLER:** Yes, this is Sharon Smith. I'm a Food  
17 Stamp worker in Clarke County, Alabama, and I have  
18 some comments.

19 **MS. WATKINS:** Thanks, Clarke County, Alabama, go  
20 right ahead.

21 **CALLER:** For one thing, I think the elderly  
22 disabled people, they need to get like a standard  
23 medical deduction or something to make them get more  
24 than \$10 of Food Stamps a month.

1           **MS. WATKINS:** Okay, thank you very much. Do you  
2 have other comments?

3           **CALLER:** Yes. Another one I can think of, the  
4 vehicle policy needs to be rewritten or revised or  
5 something. Now we take the value of the vehicle and  
6 subtract 4,650, you know, from it. And that 4,650  
7 needs to be raised. I mean, you know, because most  
8 all cars, if they run, are going to be worth more than  
9 4,650. And if we want our clients to go to work, you  
10 know, they need a dependable car. So either that  
11 needs to be raised or either another rule like exclude  
12 one vehicle per licensed driver or just exclude a  
13 vehicle for work or something like that.

14           **MS. WATKINS:** Anything else?

15           **CALLER:** That's it.

16           **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much for calling.  
17 Have a great day.

18           **CALLER:** Bye.

19           **MS. WATKINS:** All right. Tim Brock.

20           **MR. TIM BROCK:** Good afternoon.

21           **MS. WATKINS:** Good afternoon.

22           **MR. BROCK:** My name is Tim Brock. I'm with the  
23 Department of Children and Families in the state of  
24 Florida. I used to be a Food Stamp worker and

1 supervisor for a bunch of years, and that's where my  
2 love still is.

3 I've got to start with saying, as coming from  
4 the state of Florida, if you are familiar with the non  
5 citizen policy, you'll understand our concern over  
6 this thing. I recognize it might be a little naive  
7 for us to ask Congress to simplify something, but  
8 quite honestly, if you've got anybody that understands  
9 that policy, by all means send them down, because  
10 we're sure having a hell of a time with it.

11 In terms of the program name, I like the  
12 Nutrition Assistance Program.

13 We've got some idea here, in terms of thinking a  
14 little bit outside the box too, and that is, if the  
15 folks over on the SSI side of the house are creating  
16 eligibility that constitutes categorical eligibility,  
17 why can't they authorize Food Stamps for these people,  
18 as well? Why have an extra leg in that process? Why  
19 not expand program access that way?

20 We're very much, you can put a check mark down  
21 for the elderly benefit. We'd like to see a floor  
22 there of 20, 25 bucks minimum.

23 You can put a check mark down on the vehicle and  
24 assets stuff.

1           I'm a little reticent to say this, because we're  
2           now below the federal tolerance on QC, but we're  
3           really not happy with the QC process. We'd like to  
4           see improvements there. The only concern I have is,  
5           if they go and mess with it, we might lose track of  
6           where we were and be outside the tolerance again.

7           I've got to say also that I come at this world  
8           now from a systems and a technology side of the house.

9           And I very much enjoy watching you smile as you push  
10          the button and see the technology really work every  
11          once in a while.

12          One of the things that very much concerns me  
13          though is that, as Congress and the federal government  
14          provides changes to this program, that we have an  
15          appropriate opportunity to do the system  
16          implementation components of it. Some of these  
17          systems, in order to automate some very complicated  
18          policies, are very complex systems. And when you want  
19          to go and change them, even simplify them, there's a  
20          complex process that requires sufficient lead time, in  
21          order for it to be effective.

22          And I guess the other thing mainly I wanted to  
23          talk about has to do with the comments from the young  
24          lady earlier, with respect to the fact that, if we're



1 taking activities and we're putting them in this  
2 commercial environment, that we're losing control and  
3 we're not getting the best use of our money and that  
4 we should probably keep them in the public sector.  
5 And then, I guess almost immediately after, she went  
6 into a rather long discourse as to how the public  
7 sector isn't doing the job either. So I'm not sure  
8 which is the answer then. Is it the private sector or  
9 is it the public sector or what?

10 What I would suggest is that the states need  
11 some amount of flexibility in that area. We are  
12 interested in trying some different ideas, in terms of  
13 marrying public and private partnerships. Currently,  
14 we're very much restricted, in terms of how we can use  
15 private or contractor staff, in terms of improving the  
16 programs.

17 So, with that, I'd like to say thank you for  
18 listening. Come on down to Florida sometime.

19 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. We have a caller on  
20 the line. Caller, this is Shirley Watkins.

21 **CALLER:** This is Mary Andrews in Clarke County,  
22 Alabama.

23 **MS. WATKINS:** Well, you hear the audience  
24 laughing because most of the calls we've gotten today

1 have been from Alabama.

2 **CALLER:** Really?

3 **MS. WATKINS:** So it looks like Alabama got the  
4 message that we had an access opportunity.

5 **CALLER:** That's right. And we're taking  
6 advantage of it.

7 **MS. WATKINS:** Good. Go ahead.

8 **CALLER:** We want to be heard.

9 **MS. WATKINS:** Good.

10 **CALLER:** My major concern is, and I think all  
11 the workers kind of have the same idea that I have.  
12 We'd like to see the elderly with a benefit of at  
13 least \$50 a month. I don't know how it's going to be  
14 accomplished, if it's going to be through a medical  
15 deduction that will automatically be given so that  
16 will ensure that their benefit will come up to that.

17 And then we need to do something about the  
18 vehicles. We are in rural Alabama. We have people  
19 who can work but we take them off the system because  
20 of the value of their cars. When we were on assets,  
21 the policy allowed one vehicle per licensed driver.  
22 We need to do something like that again so that these  
23 people who we're having to cut off, who have nothing,  
24 who need to be on, they need a car so they can go to

1 work. We need to kind of change that.

2 And that's my comments.

3 **MS. WATKINS:** Good. Thank you very much.

4 **CALLER:** You're welcome. Bye-bye.

5 **MS. WATKINS:** Bye-bye.

6 Do we have another caller on the line? No.

7 Okay, Burt Strickland.

8 **MR. BURT STRICKLAND:** I'll come all the way up  
9 here, since I'm speaking for South Carolina. My name  
10 is Burt Strickland. I'm the county director of Marion  
11 County Department of Social Services in South  
12 Carolina. I've been working with the Food Stamp  
13 Program directly for 32 years, which pretty well dates  
14 me. I've written down some comments. When I came in  
15 the door, Virgil, they asked me did I want to make  
16 some comments because they said they knew I couldn't  
17 come here without talking about it. So I told them to  
18 add my name to the list.

19 The first thing is that I always try to be kind  
20 of innovative. In South Carolina, we try to be as  
21 innovative as we possibly can. And the federal  
22 government has been real nice in allowing us to have a  
23 good bit of flexibility, except they've got this  
24 little thing about it has to be cost neutral, which

1 sometimes gets in our way of being flexible. We would  
2 make the suggestion that, when you allow us to be  
3 flexible, that we have some kind of caveat, whereas,  
4 if our design, for example, makes the program more  
5 accessible and also we can guarantee the same level of  
6 program integrity, that we would have an opportunity  
7 to try something.

8 I run into things all the time because I'm  
9 always redesigning something and somebody is telling  
10 me I can't do it because I'm in violation of the state  
11 plan. So I'm very familiar with being told that kind  
12 of stuff.

13 But, anyway, on regard to the elderly. And I  
14 know folks don't like to hear people talk about what  
15 you're doing yourself, but we've been working very  
16 hard with our senior population on trying to expand  
17 nutrition by expanding delivered meals processes.

18 Also, Virgil, we're also doing Food Stamp  
19 outreach. I think Food Stamp outreach is very  
20 important. When I was a Food Stamp supervisor, way  
21 back yonder before about half of y'all were born, I  
22 used to go speak to groups, anywhere from two people  
23 to a church full, trying to get people to come and  
24 take advantage of the Food Stamp Program. I know that

1 sounds alien, but we actually had to get out and sell  
2 the program. And I think, you know, with Welfare  
3 Reform and people leaving the rolls, we say, well, you  
4 know, that's good but some of the things have already  
5 been discussed here today about the differences in  
6 programs.

7 It's kind of hard to utilize the Food Stamp  
8 Program. As the gentleman said a while ago, Food  
9 Stamps are his first love. Well, I've been in Food  
10 Stamps up past my ears for years. And the thing is,  
11 you know, some of the regulations that we've got and  
12 some of the limits actually are counterproductive to  
13 helping people become self-sufficient. The Food  
14 Stamp Program should be a support program so,  
15 therefore, as we identify and y'all identify things  
16 that are barriers to the program really reaching its  
17 potential, those should be really looked at.

18 One thing that I would want to recommend, is I  
19 would like to recommend that we have the option of  
20 going back to doing something that we did in four  
21 counties in South Carolina years ago. We did it and I  
22 think somewhere in California did it. We had what was  
23 known as the SSI Elderly and Disabled Cash-out. Which  
24 meant that individuals who were in this group and

1 qualified for the Food Stamp Program got money,  
2 instead of Food Stamps. It took all the stigma off of  
3 it. One thing that really hurt the program though is  
4 we couldn't go out and advertise it. So we weren't  
5 able to prove that it was more effective than not  
6 having it. I will tell you this, when they did away  
7 with it, we lost 67 percent of those people to the  
8 program in 18 months. So that's just a  
9 recommendation.

10 Another recommendation is, I like the lady that  
11 called in and said \$50. I had written down 25. But,  
12 you know, SSI, you're categorically eligible for SSI.

13  
14 Another thing is, years and years ago, if you  
15 got a welfare check in South Carolina and you got Food  
16 Stamps also, you didn't have an ending certification  
17 date. It was indefinite. I'm very familiar with that  
18 because I was running the Food Stamp Program and my  
19 FDC caseworkers would have a welfare client on  
20 indefinite certification and forget to adjust at the  
21 end of the certification period. So I'm very familiar  
22 with the indefinite date.

23 And I've got this down for SSI. SSI are  
24 categorically eligible, and they can apply for Food

1        Stamps at the Social Security office. They do not  
2        have to come to our office and file a separate  
3        application. The reason that you probably still have  
4        to have the application is they may be in the  
5        household with someone else and if you did go and say,  
6        well, you automatically get Food Stamps then you have  
7        to establish them as a prima facia case for a separate  
8        household. But I'm not saying that's -- That would be  
9        something you could look at. That would be what you  
10       would have to do. But I don't see any reason for  
11       having -- We can certify them up for two years.

12                I don't see any reason for us not having them  
13       certified indefinitely, after we determine that they,  
14       in fact, fit that category. Because two things are  
15       going to happen. If your benefit changes, the Social  
16       Security office is going to notify us electronically.

17        If they passed away, we'll figure it out after a  
18       while.

19                One good thing about the EBT card system, with  
20       the EBT card it makes it a little more difficult for  
21       people who have passed away to use their benefits.  
22       With the old Food Stamp Program, when we mailed out  
23       coupons, we did have people who had passed away who  
24       were able to use their benefits for months and months

1 and months after that had happened to them.

2 Also, the lady who got up talking about the  
3 program integrity issues, not only am I a big advocate  
4 for the Food Stamp Program and outreach, I'm also a  
5 big advocate on program integrity. We had the first  
6 county-based investigative unit in the state of South  
7 Carolina in 1975. I firmly believe in helping the  
8 needy and cutting off the hand of the greedy. And I  
9 think you can have both of them, but you have to do it  
10 with a very balanced hand.

11 One thing on the percentages, they've cut our  
12 percentage of rebates down, which has, in fact,  
13 hampered us because, in South Carolina, the counties  
14 get, the county DFS offices get half of those monies  
15 for improvement to the Food Stamp Program. And so it  
16 kind of cuts down the funds that we can put in things  
17 like outreach, improved program integrity, and client  
18 services. And also it's been a good source for  
19 emergency funds. And the reason I say that is, with  
20 the new system, and folks coming into our intake  
21 system, if they need something to eat, they don't need  
22 it three days later when they can get the card.

23 One thing I always liked about the Food Stamp  
24 Program, when I was a Food Stamp Supervisor, for years



1 and years, and even after I've been a county director,  
2 I insist on it. You come in my office and you need it  
3 and you qualify, you've got something in your hand  
4 when you leave. So now we do it with food vouchers  
5 and food assistance with help from our partners with  
6 the food banks.

7 And the reason I'm asking for more money is  
8 because the reduction in the rebates has cut back on  
9 our capabilities of having those monies. Plus, as  
10 we've gotten better with program integrity and making  
11 sure that cases are clean going into the system, with  
12 all of our technology, we've also reduced the cases  
13 that we've had to have and go collect money back from.

14 Contrary to popular belief, we do not approve  
15 people knowing they don't qualify, just so we can turn  
16 around and collect from them. I know people have  
17 accused me of that in the past but I've never done it.

18 Also in South Carolina, we are now using, I'm  
19 one of the counties that's piloting what we call our  
20 single application. You do not have to apply  
21 separately for separate programs. You fill out one  
22 application and that application is used to determine  
23 eligibility for all programs.

24 And as I was talking to Mr. Conrad last month,

1 in a meeting he and I were at, we're using it because  
2 folks have come in and applied for Medicaid. The  
3 fastest growing program in South Carolina, folks, is  
4 Medicaid. But people have come in and applied and  
5 qualified for Medicaid and nobody ever asked them did  
6 they want any food stamps. In this process, we're  
7 making sure that folks that come in for and apply for  
8 medicaid also have an opportunity to get on the Food  
9 Stamp Program, without having to make a separate  
10 application.

11 I don't think you have to change the federal  
12 requirement on that. I'm just mentioning that.

13 Sometimes people say, we can't do so and so. My  
14 feelings have always been, if you don't want me to do  
15 it, then what you better do is write down somewhere  
16 you better not do it. Because if I can't find that  
17 nowhere, then we figure you can do it.

18 Error rates. South Carolina has been very  
19 fortunate this past year. We've got a good error  
20 rate. We've got another good one going. I've got  
21 some mixed thoughts about error rates. We put a lot  
22 of energy, haven't we, Sandy and Nancy, the counties  
23 have, on education, educating clients, educating case  
24 managers, training, training, training. We have just

1 as much turnover as the rest of y'all who do training.

2

3 The only part of the error rate calculation that  
4 always hackles me is being held responsible for an  
5 under issuance to a client where the cause of the  
6 under issuance was the client not reporting something  
7 to us. Now I got over the part where they were  
8 holding me responsible for under issuance where it was  
9 our fault. I got over that. I can see how they could  
10 think that we would err on the downside to make sure  
11 we didn't go on the upside. Not that we would do  
12 that either. But the fact where it figures in where  
13 the under issuance is due to the client not reporting  
14 something to us, especially when we have our ability  
15 to restore benefits. You know, it's no harm no foul.

16 But I don't think -- I think that something should be  
17 changed so that is like held harmless and not in the  
18 calculation.

19 I'm not exactly sure how much effect that has.  
20 It has more of a chilling effect on eligibility staff  
21 when they have a case that's held in error by quality  
22 control and it was an under issuance and the client  
23 did not report something to us.

24 The process we have just gone through last year

1 in South Carolina, probably what all of you go  
2 through. Someone was talking about we've got too much  
3 work and not enough workers. We've just gone through  
4 a workload analysis process for all of our programs.  
5 I chaired the group and did the one on Food Stamps,  
6 workload analysis.

7 What I found out was what I already knew. The  
8 Food Stamp Program has become so labor intensive. I  
9 mean, years ago, we had a two-page form. You asked  
10 for it on the front and we gave it to you on the back.

11 **MS. WATKINS:** Burt, can you speed it up?

12 **MR. STRICKLAND:** I will. I'm just making this  
13 recommendation. I do not see -- I cannot see any  
14 reason for making clients come to our office every two  
15 or three months to fill out paperwork. Twenty-five  
16 percent of the meal recertification forms that we send  
17 out in South Carolina are not returned. That means  
18 the case closes. That means the client comes back to  
19 the office. The client misses an interview and the  
20 cases closes and they have to come back to the office.

21 I'm in favor of, once we determine they're eligible,  
22 give them a year's eligibility because we have enough  
23 technology and we're almost like Big Brother, we can  
24 keep up with what they're doing. And then asking them

1 to report to us and really trust them to do what we  
2 want them to do.

3 And one last thing. I think that child support  
4 should remain a state option. In South Carolina, as  
5 I'm sure the rest of you do, we can make the option  
6 available to our clients, we can offer them free legal  
7 assistance in tracking down the daddies and helping  
8 them get money, because the child support system so  
9 far has been burdened down. And the eligibility over  
10 in Family Independence makes a little bit of sense but  
11 I would like to see that remain a state option.

12 **MS. WATKINS:** You did good.

13 **MR. STRICKLAND:** Thank you.

14 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much.

15 You have an opportunity to submit other comments  
16 in writing. And I would hope all of you would look at  
17 some other kinds of things that you'd like to see us  
18 do. And please take advantage of sending those  
19 comments to us.

20 I believe we have a caller on the line. Caller,  
21 are you there? This is Shirley Watkins.

22 **CALLER:** Hi. This is Peggy Pollard. I'm calling  
23 from Rockcastle County, Kentucky. We received here at  
24 the office where I work a couple of notices. And I

1 would have loved to have come to Atlanta but we're  
2 just too busy.

3 My comments, first of all, I have a question. I  
4 don't understand, from the two notices we received,  
5 what kind of revisions you guys have in mind in the  
6 Food Stamp Program. Are you just throwing it open to  
7 see what people think or what is this about?

8 **MS. WATKINS:** We are throwing it open to see  
9 what people think.

10 **CALLER:** Okay. Let me say, both as a  
11 participant for a period of time and even I get a  
12 small amount now because my salary is so low. While I  
13 was unemployed, I received the full amount for my  
14 status, I guess, which was just a hundred twenty-seven  
15 something a month. But that was extremely necessary,  
16 during that period of time while I was unemployed. I  
17 now work with a group here in Rockcastle County, which  
18 is a very poor county in Kentucky, and the contact,  
19 our clients, the people we work with, are many of them  
20 receiving Food Stamps and they truly do depend on that  
21 amount, even though some of it seems to be a very  
22 small amount for them. I would hate to think that  
23 USDA is in any way thinking about getting rid of the  
24 program.

1           It's working better, from what I can see, now  
2           that you're using the Electronic Debit Card. The Food  
3           Stamps themselves were too easy to get hold of by the  
4           wrong people. But it's much tighter, I think, with  
5           the electronic card.

6           And just let me say, as someone that has  
7           received Food Stamps and who works with people now who  
8           receive Food Stamps, it's a necessary benefit. I  
9           guess that's about all.

10           **MS. WATKINS:** Well, caller, we appreciate you  
11           calling. And let me just say to you, we are looking  
12           at what the federal government at USDA can propose in  
13           the way of enhancing the Food Stamp Program during the  
14           reauthorization process in 2002. Because the program  
15           is a large program and it is the centerpiece of our  
16           Nutrition Assistance Programs in this country, we want  
17           to make sure that we're giving people around the  
18           country an opportunity to tell us what they think  
19           needs to be done to enhance the program. And that's  
20           what you're participating in today. We take all of  
21           the comments very seriously.

22           We did this with Child Nutrition reauthorization  
23           in 1998, and it was the first time in 20 years that an  
24           administration had sent a proposal to Congress for

1 reauthorization.

2 **CALLER:** Okay.

3 **MS. WATKINS:** We have not sent a proposal for  
4 reauthorization for the Food Stamp Program in how many  
5 years?

6 **UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER:** It's been more  
7 recent than that.

8 **MS. WATKINS:** More recent than that. She  
9 doesn't know how recent.

10 **CALLER:** Okay. Well, that's good news. The  
11 office where I work effecting the total employees, the  
12 coordinator, the boss and everything, we work with  
13 USDA in a couple of our programs. We run the farmer's  
14 market and we have participated in the WIC coupon  
15 program and, if we could get -- I understand that  
16 there are some farmer's markets who are working with  
17 or using the Food Stamps. They're set up with mobile  
18 phones or whatever. We're not ready to do that yet,  
19 but we think that that's a good area to expand into  
20 because that allows, well, it helps the farmers and it  
21 also helps the Food Stamp recipient to be able to get  
22 real food from real people with their Stamps. So  
23 that's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

24 **MS. WATKINS:** We appreciate your calling and



1           have a wonderful day.

2                   **CALLER:** Thank you.

3                   **MS. WATKINS:** Bye-bye. Is there another caller?  
4           No, all right. And we go back to Betsy Pitcock.

5                   **MS. BETSY PITCOCK:** Thank you. I'm Betsy  
6           Pitcock. I'm with the University of Tennessee. And I  
7           bring greetings from the Food and Nutrition Outreach  
8           Educational Programs that we're doing in Tennessee.  
9           We call it TENSOEP.

10                   We are very pleased to be a part of the  
11           nutrition education where we're reaching both children  
12           and adults of Food Stamp families. And as I was  
13           looking at our report that's getting ready to go in,  
14           we have reached in contacts over 5 million in  
15           Tennessee. That's more than our population. But that  
16           just means that we're working with Food Stamp families  
17           multiple times, as a part of this program. We have  
18           found that if we work with families more than one  
19           time, we do make an impact, better than we do if we  
20           only see them one time.

21                   This is a partnership with the Department of  
22           Human Services, with the University of Tennessee  
23           Extension Service, and also with Tennessee State  
24           University. We like the five indicators. We like to

1 look, as we're planning programs, as we're doing now,  
2 the food security issue, the nutrition quality, food  
3 resource management, food safety, and also the systems  
4 changes that can go on in the environment as a result  
5 of the educational programs with Food Stamp families.

6 We are in 90 counties in the state of Tennessee  
7 now. In this coming year we have 95 counties in  
8 Tennessee. Of those, there are 90 community-based  
9 coalitions that are at the grassroots that are using  
10 the Food Stamp education dollars that are provided  
11 through USDA to reach families in a variety of ways.  
12 And those are so designed by the county coalitions. No  
13 one in Knoxville, no one in Nashville is telling the  
14 county people how to use the Food Stamp education  
15 dollars in Tennessee.

16 We have established coalitions with  
17 partnerships, which include a lot of the agencies in  
18 individual communities which vary from place to place.

19 We're very excited. I have this saying that I have  
20 an opportunity in east Tennessee, of which I do 24  
21 counties, of watching people dream dreams about  
22 helping Food Stamp families and about helping children  
23 and seniors, and watching those dreams become reality,  
24 because we do needs assessment within this group. And

1 we see things happen, as a result of the actions of  
2 the people who really care.

3 And a lot of DHS offices in most counties sit on  
4 these coalitions, health departments, agencies all  
5 involved in this.

6 We do have a concern and that is that we have  
7 dieticians, we have nurses and other professionals  
8 that sit on the coalitions that I've talked about.  
9 And they are private partners and they choose to give  
10 their services to the outreach mission of reaching  
11 families. And yet the way that it's established, at  
12 this point, that is not a match, as far as in-kind  
13 dollars, because this is an in-kind match with us. We  
14 have professionals in nutrition that are giving time  
15 to the program to teach seniors, to teach children why  
16 it's important to eat breakfast. But yet their time  
17 is not a match toward our program. And that we end up  
18 counting them as bonus match, is what we've attached  
19 it to but, you know, there could be some help there in  
20 reaching families if we could count those people who  
21 are actually serving on these grassroots coalitions as  
22 being in-kind match toward this project. They are  
23 professionals.

24 And the way we're established right now, I

1 believe it's -- I know it's state, county, and city  
2 employees that can serve as our match. So, if we're  
3 looking at other match partners at the grassroots,  
4 professionals may be an opportunity for us that we  
5 would like to at least explore.

6 We also are encouraged, and we see this as an  
7 audience, that we could use opportunities with Head  
8 Start families, with Housing Communities, with WIC  
9 participants. We're doing grocery store tours. We're  
10 doing things like this with WIC. We, however, cannot  
11 use our federal partners as match, in any way. And we  
12 are -- I explain it to coalitions that, you know, one  
13 part of this leg is that you bring audience and then  
14 the city, county, and state employees bring in-kind,  
15 so the two of these partner together and make one big  
16 organization for us.

17 However, when you have a coalition made up of  
18 WIC, HUD, you know, all of the private, Head Start,  
19 all of the federal programs, and you're looking to  
20 build in-kind, particularly for counties that are just  
21 starting up in the nutrition education, you lack  
22 there. So that's another concern that we have is,  
23 yes, we're partnering in our nutrition education, and  
24 we're doing a good job at it. You know, we're really

1 reaching all of those folks that's being an  
2 opportunity for audience. But if there was anything  
3 that could be addressed on that issue, that's a  
4 concern for us also. Thank you.

5 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Vernelle Britton.

6 **MS. VERNELLE BRITTON:** Good afternoon. I'm  
7 Vernelle Britton with the Healthcare and Finance  
8 Administration, the Regional Office, here in Atlanta.  
9 And I want to thank you for the invitation and for  
10 the opportunity to say a few words.

11 I really didn't have recommendation about the  
12 Food Stamp Program, but wanted to extend my  
13 appreciation to you, Secretary Watkins, for the  
14 cooperation, collaboration with your department, with  
15 many of our programs, particularly the Children's  
16 Health Insurance program. I just left Mississippi and  
17 the gentleman there from South Carolina, hi there. I  
18 saw you yesterday. He was talking about the  
19 applications. Well, in Mississippi, the Department of  
20 Human Services is doing just that. When they go in  
21 for the eligibility, they do everything. So we are  
22 working together.

23 Child support is an issue that we just discussed  
24 on yesterday. And that's something that we think

1           should be looked at, in terms of what the eligibility  
2           workers are asking for there.

3           And the third thing, I want to put in a plug for  
4           the Georgia Nutrition Council. We sent you an  
5           invitation to be our key note speaker on February  
6           2001. So that's a plug for the Georgia Nutrition  
7           Council. Thank you very much.

8           **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. I appreciate the  
9           invitation. I don't know where I'll be in February  
10          2001. We'll wait and see what happens in the election  
11          of November of 2000, before I say where I'm going to  
12          be in February 2001.

13          Are there those of you who would like to offer  
14          some comments who have not had an opportunity?

15          **MR. CONRAD:** Right there on the front row.

16          **MS. WATKINS:** Yes, and then there's one person  
17          back here. Just give us your name. Could I take this  
18          phone call that's coming in? Would that be okay? Do  
19          we have a phone call?

20          **MR. CONRAD:** Yeah, we've got a phone call.

21          **MS. WATKINS:** Hello caller. This is Shirley  
22          Watkins.

23          **CALLER:** Hello, how are you?

24          **MS. WATKINS:** I'm wonderful. And yourself?

1                   **CALLER:** I'm just fine.

2                   **MS. WATKINS:** Good. Tell us who you are and  
3 where you're from.

4                   **CALLER:** My name is Bobbie Little and I'm from  
5 Atlanta. I was there earlier today and I didn't get a  
6 chance to speak because I had to come back to work.  
7 But I'm calling with some concerns about the Food  
8 Stamp Program. I was on the program up until May. My  
9 caseworker turned my stamps off, or the machine or  
10 whoever did, because I was supposed to have the  
11 interview on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May for June, which I never  
12 got the paper. I still have not heard anything from  
13 the paper or anything. Anyway, I went in on the 1<sup>st</sup> of  
14 June and three weeks after I went in, I still had not  
15 heard from her. So I finally got her on the phone.  
16 And she told me she needed a verification of my wages.  
17 I faxed it to her that same day. She immediately  
18 told me that was all I need. Coming up to the 4<sup>th</sup> of  
19 July, she told me I should have food stamps by the 1<sup>st</sup>,  
20 by Sunday. I didn't have them then so I finally got  
21 her back the following week. Anyway, to make a long  
22 story short, I never got them and they were cut off.  
23 She told me that if I needed to get food stamps, that  
24 I needed to go to Warren Street, which no one could

1 tell me where Warren Street was or give me a phone  
2 number. And she was not going to reactivate them.

3 The reason why I'm upset about this is because  
4 her attitude really stunk. And having to leave your  
5 job every three months to go back to the Food Stamp  
6 office and sit all day long losing time, it's really  
7 bad because you don't get a raise every three months.

8 Your wages do not change every three months. You do  
9 good if they change every six months. Now I think  
10 something needs to be done about this program, as far  
11 as these letters being sent out and these every three  
12 months interviews. And that's my comment.

13 **MS. WATKINS:** All right. Thank you, caller.

14 **CALLER:** Thank you.

15 **MS. WATKINS:** Okay.

16 **MS. IRVINA MANOR:** I'm Irvina Manor. I'm a Food  
17 Stamp and TANF eligibility supervisor. And her call  
18 is perfect timing for what I want to say because I  
19 want to say the same thing from the workers' point of  
20 view. She just about said it all. We need at least a  
21 six-month certification for employed customers. Their  
22 wages do not change. We go on the cases. They miss  
23 appointments, they lose time from their jobs. And  
24 it's just been totally unrealistic to expect the



1 client to come in every three months. It's truly  
2 burdensome and unrealistic. If we must have a short  
3 three-months cert period, can we not reserve it for  
4 customers with no income, pre visitors qualification  
5 penalties and a history of fraud referrals.

6 I had written these comments and submitted them  
7 through some people to the \$6 Million Club so I can be  
8 very brief. I think you heard me cheer on the lady  
9 who said at least a minimum of \$50 a month for Food  
10 Stamp customers who are categorically eligible. I had  
11 written down 30. Certainly a dollar a day is little  
12 enough that this country can do to help its poor  
13 impoverished clients. Only one other person alluded  
14 to the need for some provision for benefits to  
15 children in special circumstances, such as child  
16 protection service placements, foster care placements,  
17 and legal guardianships, as the result of a judicial  
18 finding of abuse and neglect.

19 I had the experience on the job of seeing a  
20 young mother accept her nieces and nephews into her  
21 home expecting cash assistance for their needs,  
22 childcare so that she could continue to work, and Food  
23 Stamps so that she could feed her household, which had  
24 doubled from four to eight overnight. She was just

1 dollars over the income limit. And I was never able  
2 to approve Food Stamps for her. This was  
3 disheartening to me because, as a mother of three,  
4 basically raised as a single parent, who historically  
5 I bought food last, so we ate a lot of beans when I  
6 was raising my kids. I understood the burden that  
7 feeding children who she was not legally responsible  
8 for but out of the compassion of her heart wanted to.

9  
10 The people from Florida alluded to grandparents  
11 having to raise children. There must be some way that  
12 we can exempt and disregard the income of these non  
13 responsible people to provide assistance for their  
14 families.

15 A very intellectual coworker of mine asked me to  
16 include a comment that we allow Internet access fees  
17 as allowable household expenses. Increase the utility  
18 standard to recognize this expense. This serves  
19 several purposes. First you encourage educational  
20 benefits and availability in homes with minor children  
21 to recognize the Internet potential to generate income  
22 and entrepreneur activities for needy families, and to  
23 provide a source for shopping and home delivery of  
24 eligible food purchased via the developing e-commerce

1 businesses.

2 It was just great being here knowing that many  
3 of us who work in this profession all across the  
4 United States are concerned about increasing the  
5 benefits to our sisters and brothers and fellow  
6 citizens.

7 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you very much.

8 **MS. PAM WHITE:** When I came into the room today,  
9 I was going to be a spectator, and I didn't think I  
10 had anything to say. But now I'd like to break the  
11 mold. My name is Pam White. I'm the executive  
12 director of the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. I'm  
13 not one of you guys. However, what I'd like to do is  
14 to thank the national Food Stamp Program. Because of  
15 all your barriers, I have job security. Every time  
16 someone has a car that's over \$4,000 or every time  
17 somebody can't get through on the phone line, I'm the  
18 one that can make sure there's food on their table  
19 that night. And I'm grateful to be your safety net.

20 What I do want to say, and I do have a point for  
21 being up here, is that I'm appalled and amazed that so  
22 much money is spent proving that low-income families  
23 should not be given food. Your first statement is  
24 that you're here to fight hunger and what you do is

1 pay people to find reasons people don't qualify for  
2 food. Thank you.

3 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Pam White.

4 **MS. WHITE:** That was me.

5 **MS. WATKINS:** Oh, okay.

6 **MS. ANN JOSEPH:** My name is Ann Joseph, and I am  
7 with the Kentucky Task Force on Hunger.

8 **MS. WATKINS:** Pull the mic down to make sure  
9 that she can hear you.

10 **MS. JOSEPH:** My name is Ann Joseph. I'm with  
11 the Kentucky Task Force on Hunger, and a participant  
12 in the Southeast Regional Anti Hunger Network,  
13 affectionately known as SERAHN. I just want to say  
14 that, along the way, my family has been a recipient of  
15 USDA's nutritional assistance programs and they were  
16 really important to the well being of my sons as they  
17 were growing up.

18 I also want to mention, before we identify  
19 problems and issues, that we really appreciate the  
20 success of the program over the past years. We've  
21 seen in Kentucky that, while there are many problems  
22 that continue in the low-income population, amongst  
23 our kids and our families, individuals, the elderly,  
24 hunger has been alleviated. And we just need to

1 continue to deal with the issues and the problems that  
2 we still have before us.

3 We know that we want to look at these problems  
4 in terms of the participants, the workers, the state  
5 agency, and, as we heard today, the retailers, as  
6 well, and to understand that the community at large  
7 benefits from the existence of the Food Stamp Program.

8  
9 I want to ask you to support the Hunger Relief  
10 Act and the Food Stamp Outreach and Research for Kids  
11 Act.

12 Several of the items that I'm going to mention  
13 have been mentioned already. We'll have a more  
14 extended list of comments for you in writing. We  
15 encourage always that you consider increasing program  
16 access, ensuring that we're reaching all eligible  
17 families and individuals. And have a strong emphasis  
18 on outreach and advocacy that was mentioned earlier,  
19 in supporting the work of non governmental agencies  
20 partnering with you, and contracting with you, and  
21 receiving funds to do the outreach work and the  
22 enrollment work, as well.

23 We encourage you to remove asset barriers, and  
24 you've heard about the vehicle issue. As far as we're

1 concerned, we would want you to consider exempting the  
2 value of one vehicle, as opposed to raising the value  
3 of the vehicle.

4 We want to look at the elimination of  
5 nonproductive financial screening items. You've said  
6 in your literature that the average Food Stamp  
7 household has about \$118 dollars in countable  
8 resources. Yet what goes on in the office with the  
9 worker and the client is papers have to go back and  
10 forth. I mean, does this really work? Is there a  
11 bang for the buck that's here? We've been doing some  
12 work in another program, Medicaid program, and we've  
13 had the secretary of our cabinet for families and  
14 children say that it costs about \$10 to identify one  
15 dollar of resources.

16 And in the last year, we actually had 12 cases,  
17 in all the cases that had been gone through, that  
18 really, where problems could be identified because of  
19 all the resource checking. So this is something we  
20 really need to look at and you all need to look at.

21 While promoting program simplification, we  
22 believe the program should maintain uniform standards  
23 and uniform benefit levels. And we think this is  
24 really critical. We don't want to see the block

1           granting kind of experience in the Food Stamp Program.

2           This is a program available to all folks and should  
3           maintain that integrity. We need to promote the Food  
4           Stamp Program, believe in it and market it.

5                     Work with states to redesign their computer  
6           systems where problems have been identified. Redesign  
7           applications and notices to ensure simplicity,  
8           readability, and attractiveness. Offer online  
9           applications. Utilize outstation workers to take  
10          applications. Allow for mail-in applications and  
11          recertification forms with addressed, return postage  
12          guaranteed envelopes enclosed with each item.

13                    Now these recommendations come out of the work  
14          that we've been doing on our Children's Health  
15          Insurance program and we've seen these efforts be  
16          productive.

17                    We would like to see a drop-off process at local  
18          offices available seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

19                    Look at issues of points and hours. Consider a  
20          transitional Food Stamp benefit as we have now in  
21          transitional medical assistance to working families.

22                    Address the needs of the non English speaking  
23          populations, as was referred to earlier regarding the  
24          Hispanic populations. There are other populations we

1           need to consider as well.

2                     Our goal should not be simply moving people off  
3           the program but rather assuring that we see the Food  
4           Stamp Program as part of a making work pay initiative.

5           As more people move into jobs, often low-wage jobs,  
6           certainly in our states in the southeast, we need to  
7           ensure that these families have the supports available  
8           so that, as they work, they can adequately support,  
9           the worker can support themselves and their  
10          family. Through a combination of programs, we should  
11          see that families are able to move up and out of  
12          poverty and the Food Stamp Program needs to be a part  
13          of that effort.

14                    I mentioned this earlier and I will say this  
15          again, that we really should look at the work some of  
16          our states have been doing on the implementation of  
17          the Children's Health Insurance program. There is a  
18          model there for outreach as well as application and  
19          enrollment simplification.

20                    Thanks for the opportunity. Thanks for the  
21          invitation. And we look forward to continuing our  
22          conversation.

23                    **MS. WATKINS:** Good. Thank you. Are there other  
24          comments? Yes.



1                   **MS. CONNIE REINHARDT:** Madam Under Secretary, my  
2 name is Connie Reinhardt. I'm from the state of  
3 Florida.

4                   **MS. WATKINS:** Could you hold on just a moment?  
5 We have a caller on the line.

6                   **MS. REINHARDT:** Sure.

7                   **MS. WATKINS:** Hello caller. This is Shirley  
8 Watkins.

9                   **CALLER:** Hi. My name is Nan Shazony. I'm a  
10 staff attorney with Georgia Legal Services Program in  
11 Tifton. Can you all hear me?

12                   **MS. WATKINS:** Yes, we can. Thanks so much for  
13 calling in.

14                   **CALLER:** Sure, sure. I meant to call earlier  
15 but the day kind of got ahead of me. Should I just  
16 start speaking?

17                   **MS. WATKINS:** Sure. Just go right ahead with  
18 your comments.

19                   **CALLER:** Well, I was interested in making some  
20 comments about migrant seasonal farm workers. I work  
21 for Georgia Legal Services Program, as I said, out of  
22 the Tifton office. And we represent migrant seasonal  
23 farm workers, throughout the state of Georgia,  
24 primarily with employment-related issues.

1           I have spoken with a number of community groups  
2           and have come up with some following problem areas or  
3           issues with the way the Food Stamp Program is  
4           currently being implemented in the state of Georgia.  
5           And have come up, like I said, with just three sort of  
6           broad issues that any new legislation or regulations  
7           or program directives could maybe address.

8           You may know, we have over 80,000 to 100,000  
9           migrant seasonal farm workers working in Georgia crops  
10          each year. Most are monolingual Spanish speakers.  
11          Many are legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens  
12          and many have children who are legal permanent  
13          residents and U.S. citizens. Put simply, farm workers  
14          who qualify for Food Stamps often have problems  
15          getting them.

16          The first main problem is that local offices  
17          aren't providing interpreters. If there is no  
18          bilingual staff on hand to go through the application  
19          process with the farm worker, that's an obvious  
20          problem because both the applicant and the caseworker  
21          need to understand the answers to the application.  
22          And the farm workers need to understand what the  
23          guidelines are and what the eligibility guidelines  
24          are. Farm workers have been denied, even though they

1 are eligible just because of inadequate communication.

2 And without interpreters, you have people guessing.

3 Like I said, you know, upon review, we've been  
4 finding that people are wrongly denied, just because  
5 of miscommunications. This problem can be addressed  
6 by simply hiring competent bilingual staff.

7 The second main issue area that we've come up  
8 with is the problem of accessibility. The office  
9 hours out here are usually just from 8:00 to 5:00 and  
10 farm workers work during the day. So it's often hard  
11 for them to miss work in order to get to their  
12 appointment.

13 And I suppose that it merits stating that even  
14 though farm workers are working, their wages are so  
15 low and their family size might be so big that they  
16 still qualify for food stamps, even though they're  
17 employed. That seems obvious but I just wanted to get  
18 that out there.

19 So even extending office hours one day a week to  
20 maybe 7:00 p.m. or maybe 8:00 would be a great help  
21 for workers who, you know, don't want to miss work but  
22 who are still eligible for Food Stamps and who wish to  
23 apply.

24 Another part of the accessibility problem is a

1 lack of transportation to the local offices to make  
2 their appointments. Well, I guess I could say, most  
3 farm workers live outside of urban centers. Even in  
4 the rural areas, they live outside of the towns where  
5 most of the offices are located. And many farm  
6 workers don't have their own transportation. They  
7 might share transportation with another family. Or,  
8 if a family does have a car, they only have one car  
9 per family and most of the time someone needs to use  
10 the car to get to work. So often it's hard to  
11 coordinate transportation to get to their  
12 appointments. And this problem could be remedied by  
13 hiring maybe outreach workers that would be able to  
14 see farm workers where they live or, at the very  
15 least, more closer to where they live, and could maybe  
16 do applications on site.

17 That might not necessarily have to be something  
18 that happens all the time but just like maybe  
19 extending office hours one day a week. Maybe in the  
20 heavy harvest months in certain regions of Georgia  
21 they could have an outreach worker working at that  
22 time.

23 The third main problem area or issue area that I  
24 wanted to bring up was one of cultural sensitivity to

1 immigration issues. Many local offices are asking for  
2 immigration documents or Social Security numbers when  
3 they don't need to be. For example, when an  
4 undocumented parent is applying for a qualifying  
5 eligible child. And the parent is absolutely  
6 discouraged from doing so because they're fearful that  
7 they'll be deported. And they have this impression  
8 because one of maybe community rumors but another,  
9 there are maybe staff at local offices that are  
10 actually asking those parents for their Social  
11 Security numbers or for their immigration documents  
12 when they really shouldn't be because what's really  
13 important is that the child is eligible, if they're  
14 applying for their child.

15 This is obviously a big problem because there  
16 are eligible farm worker children going hungry when  
17 they don't need to be going hungry because they are  
18 eligible.

19 And so this problem could perhaps be remedied  
20 just by simply educating the local offices more on  
21 this issue and making them aware that they do not need  
22 to ask the parents for immigration documents or their  
23 Social Security numbers when the parent isn't the one  
24 that's going to be obtaining the benefit, that it's

1 really the child that's seeking the benefits and the  
2 parents just applying on their behalf.

3 I guess, as a side note, I've heard that some  
4 local offices are actually reviewing immigration  
5 documents for legal permanent residents and U.S.  
6 citizens who have real valid documents. And they're  
7 saying that they're not real. So they're, in effect,  
8 you know, calling the applicants liars when, you know,  
9 it's not their role to be scrutinizing the documents.

10 That's the role of the INS, not the role of the local  
11 Food Stamp office.

12 So I guess that's it. I don't know if anyone  
13 had any questions about the problem areas that I've  
14 raised. You've been there for a couple of hours  
15 already today. Maybe people have already been raising  
16 these issues.

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Well, we certainly thank you,  
18 caller, for your comments. Thank you very much.

19 **CALLER:** Okay.

20 **MS. WATKINS:** Bye-bye.

21 **CALLER:** Bye.

22 **MS. WATKINS:** Now, yes, ma'am.

23 **MS. CONNIE REINHARDT:** As I indicated, my name  
24 is Connie Reinhardt. I'm from the state of Florida,

1 the Department of Children and Families. I have, in  
2 the past 27 years, worked in a variety of different  
3 lives, all of which touched the Food Stamp Program in  
4 some way.

5 At present, in my present life, I am the  
6 director of Electronic Benefits and Electronic Funds  
7 Transfer for our state. I have worked with this  
8 program since its infancy. I worked with EBT and was  
9 a liaison for our state when the standalone projects  
10 and the demonstrations began. I worked with the  
11 national prototype, helped put the building blocks  
12 together. And without all of the stakeholders being  
13 at the table, we would not have been a success.

14 EBT is a success in the state of Florida. I am  
15 a proponent. I speak it everywhere I go. It has been  
16 good for our clientele. Our clientele have supported  
17 us. Our Legal Services offices worked with us to  
18 create the policies, to create the procedures and the  
19 work that we do in the state of Florida. Our  
20 retailers, our third-party processors, our networks,  
21 such as HONOR, STAR, all participate in the program  
22 within the state of Florida.

23 I say this because I know that many other states  
24 do very much the same as we do. I also know that

1 programs were developed differently, at different  
2 times, and at different places. And we are all at  
3 different places, at this time, trying to go forward  
4 together.

5 From a couple of perspectives, I want to commend  
6 the USDA in our work on EBT. You have been the  
7 staunch federal partner that we have always been able  
8 to count on. You have stood by us, behind us, and in  
9 front of us at various times, both nationally and at  
10 the southeast regional office. We have a wonderful  
11 relationship with you and your staff. We have worked  
12 with the inter-operateability legislation, which I  
13 certainly commend you for supporting, and would  
14 encourage us to continue down that road so that a  
15 benefit that was paper before and could be used  
16 anywhere, just like cash, can still be done just like  
17 your or my debit card that we can use at any terminal  
18 across the nation.

19 Florida is inter-operateable with all 50 states.

20 I can tell you this because I see reports every month  
21 that tell me my cards are used in all 50 states. They  
22 may not be certified or have a certification period  
23 that is continuing in Florida but they may have a  
24 balance on that card and, therefore, their cash and



1       their Food Stamps continue to be able to be available  
2       to them.

3               We support eight programs in our system in the  
4       state of Florida. All of them cash but one. The Food  
5       Stamp Program is probably one of the most important  
6       thing to the clients in our state.

7               Multi cultural diversity, yeah, we got it.  
8       Forty single language minorities in Dade County. We  
9       have English as a second language there.

10              We look forward to the comments that this lady  
11       just made of opening up these systems to further  
12       enhancements. We want Priceline.com available to our  
13       people. We talk about stigma but then we don't think  
14       that we have it. But just because you're poor,  
15       doesn't mean that you don't have access to other  
16       things. At state libraries, the Internet, things of  
17       this nature are becoming more and more common to  
18       everybody, as we go forward.

19              And we certainly would support -- We know that  
20       the retailers do support avenues of this nature and we  
21       would support developing the PKI that is necessary for  
22       us to be able to do this.

23              In improving EBT, yes, I know that you have  
24       heard that there have been problems recently with the

1 new gateway. We have an old gateway and a new  
2 gateway. But I do remember that several years ago we  
3 had problems with the old gateway too that we had to  
4 resolve. Any change in a system that I have ever  
5 worked with, both eligibility, my own computer system  
6 at home, or any other system may have problems that  
7 have to be improved upon.

8 And that is not to make light of it. We are  
9 very concerned. I was very disturbed over any  
10 interruption, be it one client with one card or be it  
11 a merchant who cannot do business, be it a third. I  
12 have worked with them long enough to where I know most  
13 of them to date. Most of the people in this room that  
14 are working with EBT I have been familiar with.

15 We will improve this situation as well. We will  
16 not have it continue. I guarantee you that, because  
17 we do control the contracts, and we will see that this  
18 situation will improve. And, Scott Johnson, I hope  
19 you will take that to heart.

20 We, as well, would like to recommend some  
21 changes to Food Stamp policy, in this area. Your  
22 adjustment rules that just came out takes us a far  
23 place from where we have been and we love it for the  
24 place that it now takes up but we need to go to the

1 next step. We need to look at what is done in EBT  
2 because we say that now we are piggybacking on the  
3 commercial network, but we truly do not.

4 One of the things that has been so complex about  
5 EBT for Food Stamps versus cash is that the  
6 complexities and the differences within the programs  
7 have made it so. We have an entirely different ISO  
8 than anything commercial that exists just because we  
9 have nuances that don't operate commercially.

10 So what I would ask is that we do sit down.  
11 I've had conversations with Tim O'Connor, who I dearly  
12 love, over this issue as well. Sit down and take our  
13 eligibility, our issuance, our benefit recovery, our  
14 quality control, let's look at them all across the  
15 board and let's look at what the impact on the  
16 electronic environment and the information age changes  
17 have done to many of these policies and programs,  
18 particularly in EBT, and let's move forward. And we  
19 would be happy, as always, to work with you.

20 One of the most important things that I think is  
21 that cost neutrality in EBT, from a federal  
22 perspective, I think is no longer applicable. We  
23 measured cost neutrality on what we used to do in the  
24 paper system. In the state of Florida, before we had

1 EBT, 98 percent of all that we issued went over the  
2 counter. We had huge issuance offices. You talk  
3 about miles of clientele. I've seen them in a bad  
4 time with a computer system two to three miles long in  
5 Miami.

6 You have the opportunity, I think, with EBT, to  
7 improve it again and to continue this improvement, if  
8 we can change the way that we look at the funding  
9 structure, if we can change the way and provide some  
10 alternatives and flexibilities in how we procure and  
11 contract for these services and what things might be  
12 included or might not be included in sharing best  
13 practices.

14 But I would definitely, as far as the  
15 regulations are concerned, I think cost neutrality has  
16 been something that was very valuable to us as a place  
17 to begin but because states tended to run very  
18 efficient paper systems, because they wanted low  
19 overhead, they had to manage those paper processes.  
20 USDA paid for all shipping and delivery and printing  
21 and things of that nature. That, we are now being  
22 judged on EBT, on what we used to pay in paper. If we  
23 have the ability, now that we have rules we never had  
24 in the paper side of the house, to take some of these

1 under consideration, not have them counted against us,  
2 then we could take those improvements and make them  
3 cost beneficial. And that is what I would hope that  
4 we would target for the future.

5 Thank you very much. It's been a long day.

6 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Are there other people  
7 who would like to offer comments?

8 **MR. CONRAD:** Scott's got to say one more thing.

9 **MR. SCOTT JOHNSON:** I'd like to come back and I  
10 just want to go on the record on a really targeted  
11 issue. But I just wanted to have it spoken here at  
12 our conversation. This is Scott Johnson from the Food  
13 Marketing Institute.

14 I want to express concern about a specific area  
15 of the Food Stamp Program. That's the one in Puerto  
16 Rico. As you know, Puerto Rico has a large portion of  
17 its population that are Food Stamp recipients. Their  
18 version of the Food Stamp Program or, I should say the  
19 program funded by the USDA FNS and the Food Stamp  
20 funds is called PUN or, as we would say it, Nutrition  
21 Assistance Program. Several years ago, PUN became a  
22 cash-out program, meaning all benefits were delivered  
23 by check and can be spent in any manor without  
24 restriction. Not the intent, we believe, of the USDA

1 Food Stamp Program. In brief, the program funded by  
2 USDA FNS Food Stamp budget in Puerto Rico is a welfare  
3 program and not a nutrition program.

4 Grocers had hoped that with the advent of EBT  
5 that the program might be refocused to become once  
6 again a nutrition-oriented program. It doesn't appear  
7 that this will be the case. The Puerto Rican  
8 government seems to be intent on keeping the new EBT-  
9 based program the same as before.

10 We would urge the USDA to persuade those in  
11 charge of the program in Puerto Rico to restore  
12 integrity to the program by returning it to be a  
13 program similar to that that's in the 50 states and  
14 helping assure that families in Puerto Rico get the  
15 nutritional assistance that they need and deserve.  
16 Thanks.

17 **MS. WATKINS:** Thank you. Is there anyone else  
18 who'd like to add to the conversation?

19 Let me just tell you how much I appreciate you  
20 being here today. You've been just wonderful to sit  
21 here and listen to all of the discussion. If you're  
22 like myself, you've learned a lot. It's been an  
23 interesting opportunity.

24 And I want to thank the staff. We have a large

1 staff behind these curtains back here who have been  
2 manning the telephones, as well as the staff that  
3 helped to make arrangements to prepare to make certain  
4 that this day was successful.

5 I know that we're going to be here and I would  
6 suspect that you might want to leave but somebody else  
7 may come in. We told them we'd be here till 7:00 so  
8 we'll be here till 7:00. And if you want to leave,  
9 you feel free to leave whenever you need to or visit  
10 with other people who are here and share some  
11 interesting comments. We would hope that you would  
12 continue to think about ways we can improve, ways we  
13 can make things better. We've heard a lot of good  
14 positive comments today. That's what we had hoped.  
15 We've heard some wonderful ideas, some things that we  
16 can grasp. Some of the things we even might be able  
17 to do before reauthorization. We appreciate so much  
18 that you've been so generous with your time and  
19 sharing with us. And I would say, if you want to  
20 leave, feel free to do so. Thank you very much. But  
21 I'll still be here.

22 **MS. WATKINS:** Hello, caller. This is Shirley  
23 Watkins at the USDA Food Stamp Program Conversation.

24 **CALLER:** Hello.

1                   **MS. WATKINS:** How are you?

2                   **CALLER:** Fine. I'm a social worker and I'd like  
3 to make some comments.

4                   **MS. WATKINS:** Sure. You want to state your  
5 name.

6                   **CALLER:** Glenda Dalbere.

7                   **MS. WATKINS:** Do you want to tell us where  
8 you're from?

9                   **CALLER:** I'm in Clarke County, Alabama.

10                  **MS. WATKINS:** Clarke County, Alabama, go right  
11 ahead.

12                  **CALLER:** Okay. I'd like to suggest we raise the  
13 amount subtracted from the value of vehicles to  
14 \$10,000 or exempt one vehicle per licensed driver.

15                  I'd also like to make a suggestion about the  
16 elderly disabled medical. I think we should just give  
17 one standard deduction for each elderly or disabled  
18 person or allow the elderly or disabled get a minimum  
19 allotment of \$50 or up to the maximum for one person.

20                  **MS. WATKINS:** Okay. Do you have other comments?

21                  **CALLER:** That's the only ones I can think of  
22 now. I'm sure I could....

23                  **MS. WATKINS:** Well, very good. Thank you so  
24 much for calling in and you have a great day.



1                   **CALLER:** You too. Bye.

2                   **MS. WATKINS:** Bye-bye. Okay.

3                   (Whereupon, Ms. Watkins retires from the

4 meeting.)

5                   **MR. CONRAD:** Hello, caller. This is Virgil

6 Conrad, your regional administrator.

7                   **CALLER:** Oh, yes. Well, thank you for answering

8 my call. Is this to make calls in reference to --

9 This is for the Food Stamps?

10                  **MR. CONRAD:** Yes, it is. I'm receiving the

11 calls at this hour for Ms. Watkins who had to go to

12 another meeting.

13                  **CALLER:** Okay.

14                  **MR. CONRAD:** So you go right ahead and we're

15 going to record your comments.

16                  **CALLER:** Okay. My comment is one regarding

17 resources.

18                  **MR. CONRAD:** Wait a minute, ma'am. Would you

19 identify yourself, please, and where you're from.

20                  **CALLER:** I'm calling from the state of Alabama

21 Department of Human Resources.

22                  **MR. CONRAD:** Okay.

23                  **CALLER:** One of the comments I would like to see

24 a change in is the resources for vehicles. Vehicles

1 are more expensive. People cannot eat vehicles or  
2 whatever and too many people are eliminated because of  
3 that. I've been with Food Stamps for almost 20 years  
4 and it has moved up. It started out, I think, at  
5 4,500 and now it's 4,650, \$150. But vehicles cost as  
6 much as houses used to cost. So I think that should  
7 be -- Is this the type of comments you're looking for?

8 **MR. CONRAD:** Exactly. You go right ahead. Any  
9 ideas that you have to improve the program.

10 **CALLER:** Okay. That would, you know, I think  
11 that would be.

12 And let's see, there's another policy on people  
13 who are disabled, disabled but under 60 years of age  
14 to purchase and prepare their food separately. I see  
15 no difference in a person who is disabled and under 60  
16 and one who is disabled and over 60. But the person  
17 who is disabled and under 60 and if they live with a  
18 household member, cannot be separate from that  
19 household member unless someone outside the household  
20 comes in and purchases and prepares -- Unless they're  
21 able to purchase and prepare their food themselves or  
22 someone from outside the household comes and purchases  
23 and prepares their food for them. And I don't see any  
24 difference and I think it's a ridiculous rule.

1           **MR. CONRAD:** Okay. Any other ideas or comments?  
2           **CALLER:** I beg your pardon?  
3           **MR. CONRAD:** Do you have any other ideas or  
4 comments?  
5           **CALLER:** I can't think of anything right now but  
6 by the time I get home I could probably give you some  
7 more and call you again.  
8           **MR. CONRAD:** Well, if you do, you can send in  
9 written comments. You can send them in on our Web  
10 page.  
11           **CALLER:** Okay. Is it listed on this sheet? I  
12 don't see your Web page.  
13           **MR. CONRAD:** Well, it's on that sheet where you  
14 can send your written comments.  
15           **CALLER:** Okay then. Well, I'll look for the Web  
16 page. I can put it on the computer then.  
17           **MR. CONRAD:** Okay, good deal.  
18           **CALLER:** Thank you.  
19           **MR. CONRAD:** Uh-huh, bye-bye.  
20 Hello, caller. This is Virgil Conrad.  
21           **CALLER:** Hi, Virgil Conrad. This is Thelma  
22 Sanders Hunter in Tennessee State University in  
23 Nashville.  
24           **MR. CONRAD:** Thelma, would you go ahead and

1 provide your comments. We're going to record them.  
2 Ms. Watkins had another appointment this evening and  
3 she had to leave a few minutes ago so I'm hosting your  
4 call.

5 **CALLER:** Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to say  
6 how pleased I am to be part of the program for the  
7 Food and Nutrition Service. I am conducting the  
8 program from Tennessee State University, working  
9 collaboratively with the University of Tennessee.

10 **MR. CONRAD:** Yes, I know you well, but go ahead  
11 and tell me what you want to -- what comments you  
12 have.

13 **CALLER:** The comments I have is I want to talk  
14 about the effectiveness of what I have been doing here  
15 in my program in working with nontraditional  
16 audiences.

17 **MR. CONRAD:** Okay.

18 **CALLER:** And I have begun working with trainers  
19 from our county sheriff department here to work with  
20 inmates. We're doing a pilot program with the  
21 nutrition education and consumer education program.  
22 And so far it's one that the sheriff's department  
23 seems to be willing to buy into.

24 So we're piloting, at this point, but we can say

1           that, based on the pretest that we have given to the  
2           inmates and the amount of participation that they have  
3           rendered to us, we feel that this training will  
4           benefit those who are, as I said, part of the  
5           nontraditional audiences.

6                 **MR. CONRAD:**   Excellent.   Do you have any other  
7           comments or suggestions for improving the program?

8                 **CALLER:**   I wouldn't say anything for improvement  
9           but for us to be able to continue to network with  
10          other agencies and organizations as we have been  
11          doing.   And I think that that, in itself, is a seller.

12                **MR. CONRAD:**   Okay, very good.   Thank you.

13                **CALLER:**   Okay, thank you.   Bye.

14                **MR. CONRAD:**   Bye-bye.

15                (Whereupon, the meeting was concluded at 7:00  
16          p.m.)  
17